THE PHILOSOPHICAL WORKS

Of the late Right Honorable

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VOLUME II.

LONDON,

Printed in the Year MDCCLIV.

CONTENTS.

ESSAY II. continued.

SOME reflexions on the folly and presumption of philosophers, especially in matters of the first philosophy;
On the rise and progress of their boasted science;
On the propagation of error and superstition; and
On the partial attempts that have been made to reform the abuses of human reason. 1—155

ESSAY III.

Containing some further reflections on the rise and progress of monotheism, that first and great principle of natural theology, or the first philosophy, 157—238

ESSAY IV.

Concerning authority in matters of religion 239—412

ESSAY

THE SECOND.

SECTION V.

SINCE I have mentioned the compatibility of ſome remains of the groſſeſt polytheiſm with monotheiſm, and the principles on which the few might conform to the many, at leaſt in the exteriors of religion; it is neceſſary that I ſhould explain myſelf on theſe heads, which contain the ſum of theology or the firſt philoſophy, as it was underſtood by the moſt intelligent of the heathen, even in thoſe countries where idolatry ſeemed to triumph the moſt.

IT cannot be proved, without the help of the Old teſtament, nor very well with it, as I have hinted above, that the unity of God was the primitive belief of mankind: neither does it appear to my apprehenſion that in fact it could be ſo according to all the rules of judging that may be drawn from reaſon and analogy. But yet I think it ſufficiently evident, from reaſon and analogy both, that this firſt and great principle of natural theology could not fail to be diſcovered as ſoon as ſome men began to contemplate themſelves and all the objects that ſurrounded them, and to puſh their philoſophical reſearches

up from cauſes, that muſt be the effects of other cauſes, to a firſt, intelligent, ſelf-exiſtent cauſe of all things. Accordingly, we find that this diſcovery had been made in Egypt, and all the eaſtern nations that were famous for learning and knowledge, long before the dates of our moſt antient memorials: whereas the ſame diſcovery does not appear to have been made by thoſe people, whom we are able to view in theſe memorials, before they emerged out of ignorance into the light of knowledge and philoſophical truth.

If I would deſcend into particular proofs, to confirm by the teſtimony of antient writers what I advance on a probability that reaſon and analogy will ſupport, I ſhould not be at a loſs to furniſh them. But I conſider that the work is done to my hands in a much better manner, than I ſhould be able to do it, and that it would be ridiculous to diſplay my little pedlar's ſhop of learning before you, when ſo immenſe a ſtorehouſe of it lies open in the true Intellectual ſyſtem of the univerſe. There you will find a full and ſuperabundant collection of proofs, that demonſtrate, beyond a poſſibility of doubting, the unity of God to have been acknowledged by the moſt antient of the idolatrous nations; tho they may not demonſtrate, as I think they do not, that this was the primitive faith of mankind: becauſe we ſee that the things of this world are in a perpetual rotation, and becauſe in ſeveral countries, at ſeveral periods, men may have gone from idolatry

latry to true religion, and have fallen from this back again into idolatry; as we know that divers nations have gone from barbarity to politeneſs, and then have finiſhed the round, and have returned from politeneſs to barbarity. EUSEBIUS, and a multitude of other writers after him, would have us believe that it was the particular prerogative of God's choſen people to be in poſſeſſion of this knowledge, tho the contrary may be proved, even from his own writings, as well as by the confeſſion of ſaint AUSTIN, and of other fathers of the church: and JOSEPHUS * aſſerts that ABRAHAM was the firſt who dared to ſay that there is but one God. ABRAHAM ſeems, according to this hiſtorian, to have derived his knowledge of the one true God from philoſophical obſervation and meditation, before he became ſo well acquainted with the Supreme Being, as he was afterwards when God entered into a covenant with him. He could not derive it by tradition from his anceſtors; ſince JOSEPHUS and PHILO, and many of the rabbins, affirm that the father of the faithful was bred an idolater. Shall we think it ſtrange now, that other men ſhould diſcover, by their meditations on the works of God, what ABRAHAM diſcovered? Has this fundamental article then of all true theology ſo little proportion to our clear and beſt determined ideas? Or is it ſo repugnant to all the phaenomena of nature? Much otherwiſe. It is ſo well proportioned to one, and ſo agreeable

* Antiq. Jud. lib. i. c. 7.

to both, that we ſhould be juſtly ſurpriſed to obſerve the affectation of reſtraining this knowledge to the patriarchs and their deſcendants, if it was not as eaſy as it is to diſcern that the Jews meant to do greater honor to their nation, and to reflect greater authority on their revelations, and that the Chriſtians thought it proper to maintain this groundleſs aſſertion in order to ſhew the preparation for, as well as the neceſſity of, a new revelation to the Jews and Gentiles both.

But let us not be deceived, by the vanity of one, nor by the artifice of the other. God never left himſelf without a witneſs: which witneſs is the whole ſyſtem of his works; tho human reaſon muſt be cultivated to diſcover this, as well as other truths, and tho it has not been therefore diſcovered alike by all people, and at all times. All truth requires ſome ſearch, and many are to be acquired by labor. But there is no one that requires leſs labor than this, as there is no one that deſerves or rewards our ſearch ſo well. Thus I think, and in thinking thus I adore the goodneſs of the Supreme Being. Biſhop Wilkins ſays, in his Principles of natural religion *, that "the things which diſtinguiſh human nature from all other things are "the chief principles and foundations of religion, "namely, the apprehenſion of a Deity, and an "expectation of a future ſtate after this life, "which no other creature below man doth par-

* L. ii. c. 1.

"take

"take of.——It is not reaſon in the general, "which is the form of human nature, becauſe "there are ſome degrees of ratiocination diſcer-"nible in the brute creation, and ſuch a natural "ſagacity as at leaſt bears a near reſemblance "to reaſon." Thus the good biſhop makes the difference between reaſon in man and in other animals very rightly to conſiſt in the degree, not in the kind, without perceiving how far this conceſſion of an apparent truth would carry him in the diſpute about ſouls, and material and immaterial ſpirits. But even in the caſe before us it will not ſerve his purpoſe, nor evince that reaſon, as it is determined to actions of religion, is the particular form of human nature. It will prove at moſt that ſome men have, and that no other ſpecies of animals has in general, nor in particular inſtances, the faculty we call reaſon in ſuch a degree, as to render them capable of diſcovering the exiſtence of the Supreme Being, and the duties of natural religion. I ſaid ſome men, becauſe even among the creatures that are all commonly, but perhaps erroneouſly, comprehended in this ſpecies on account of their outward form, there are ſtupid ſavages, of whom it ſeems lawful to doubt whether they are able to make greater diſcoveries concerning God and religion, than the half-reaſoning elephant. Upon the whole matter, they, who ſuppoſe all men incapable to attain a full knowledge of natural theology and religion without revelation, take from us the very eſſence and form of man, according to the

biſhop, and deny that any of us have that degree of reaſon, which is neceſſary to diſtinguiſh our ſpecies, and ſufficient to lead us to the unity of a firſt intelligent cauſe of all things.

Now ſince the unity of God might be known by a due uſe of human reaſon, and ſince it was actually known to the antient legiſlators, who eſtabliſhed the myſteries ſpoken of for the ſupport of religion, and religion for the ſupport of government, it cannot ſeem marvellous that this doctrine was taught in the celebration of the greater myſteries. The marvel would be, if it had not been taught in them. But then there is as little room to wonder that the ſame men ſhould eſtabliſh the belief of a divine monarchy, as they did eſtabliſh it. By degrading the pagan gods they deſtroyed the ariſtocraſy of heaven: and by reaſoning from human ideas of order they ran of courſe into an hypotheſis, which has been adopted in ſome manner or other by the jewiſh, the chriſtian, the mahometan, and every other ſyſtem of theology. They ſuppoſed that the making and governing the world required the miniſtration of a multitude of inferior beings; beings not eternal, but produced in time by emanation, or by ſome other inconceivable manner of generation, concerning all which there has been more abſurdity propagated by Pagans and Chriſtians, whether heretics or orthodox, than all the bedlams of the world can match. When they reaſoned à poſteriori, from the works

to

to the exiſtence of one God, they reaſoned well, and they arrived at truth. But when they reaſoned in the ſame manner from economical and political inſtitutions of human wiſdom, they reaſoned ill, and fell into error. This error however was pious error: and pious error is more excuſable than pious fraud. They dared not preſume to ſuppoſe the ſupreme incomprehenſible and ineffable Being employed conſtantly, nor at all immediately, about human affairs; and yet they thought divine providence neceſſary in the general conduct of theſe, as they diſcerned plainly that it was neceſſary to preſerve and rule the great machine of the univerſe. Much leſs dared they ſuppoſe this Being to be the tutelary local divinity of any one people, and much leſs ſtill to be an earthly king in the literal acceptation of the word. They were not enough familiariſed with the belief of divine revelations, to frame ſuch conceptions as theſe.

Some of their philoſophers, indeed, refined ſo ſublimely their ſpeculations about the Supreme Being, that they grew quite unintelligible. God was, in their conceit, above all eſſence, tho exiſtent, above all intelligence, tho intelligent. He was in all things, and contained all things:

"Jupiter eſt quodcunque vides, quocunque
"moveris."

He pervaded, he animated the whole world; and, like the ſoul, gave life and motion to all the parts

of it. In him they lived, and moved, and had their being. Some of theſe men therefore, whilſt they ſeemed to worſhip the parts of this viſible corporeal ſyſtem, might really worſhip the inviſible God alone, in the various manifeſtations of his wiſdom, energy, and power. I ſay ſome of them; becauſe it muſt be confeſſed that ſome even of thoſe who had been conſummated by admiſſion into the greater myſteries, were not entirely orthodox on this head. They adopted notions more intelligible, and leſs unworthy of the deity, than many that have been mentioned, but ſuch however as had too near an analogy to man, and to the affairs of mankind. They imagined a divine monarchy on a human plan, the adminiſtration of which was not carried on by the immediate agency of God himſelf, but mediately, as in terreſtrial monarchies, by that of inferior agents, according to the ranks and the provinces allotted to them. Such were the celeſtial gods, the ſun, the moon, the ſtars, or the ſpirits more properly who inhabited and preſided in them, who directed their motions, and maintained their influences. Such again, but in a lower order, were the etherial and aërial demons, the genii and the lares, who dwelled below the moon, and had little elſe in charge but what related to man, and even to particular men. Such again were heroes and public benefactors, who might well be admitted into the celeſtial hierarchy; for, by the very doctrine of the myſteries, private devotions, and the exerciſe of private virtues, could render

render men like to gods here, and gods hereafter.

Since greater purity of manners, and a more internal devotion were required of the initiated than of the vulgar, it is but reaſonable to conclude that in the myſteries the gods were reformed, as well as their worſhippers; that Jupiter was no longer the whoremaſter he had been repreſented, nor Mercury the pimp, nor Venus the common ſtrumpet, and ſo on. But ſtill it muſt be confeſſed that thoſe fictitious divinities, which ſuperſtition and poetry had invented, which the leſſer myſteries had preſerved, and which the greater had tolerated, were alike numerous and ridiculous, as well as the rites and ceremonies inſtituted in honor of them, and practiſed even by thoſe who were conſummated in the greater myſteries. Thus in the eleuſinian orgia, for inſtance, not to quote thoſe of Bacchus, the moſt extravagant and the ſooneſt corrupted of any, the wanderings of Ceres in ſearch of her daughter were dramatically repreſented, and the initiated ran about like frantic people with lighted torches in their hands.

If this apparent idolatry moves your indignation, call to mind the diſtinction of a worſhip of latria and a worſhip of dulia. They, who acknowledged but one God, could pay the firſt to that God alone: they could not be idolaters. They might honor the other divinities, as your church

church honors her ſaints, by the ſecond. If this ridiculous worſhip moves your laughter, have a care: it was in thoſe days juſt as it is in ours, and in paganiſm juſt as it is in chriſtianity. The intelligent pagans, who were conſummated in the myſteries, could explain away, no doubt, ſome of the apparent abſurdities of theſe rites, and give good prudential reaſons for their compliance with others. CELSUS had boaſted that he was fully acquainted with the chriſtian religion, and on that ſuppoſed acquaintance had preſumed to cenſure it. ORIGEN, as I find him quoted by CUDWORTH, ſhews CELSUS that it was not leſs impertinent in him to pretend to be well informed of chriſtian theology, than it would be in a ſtranger who ſojourned in Egypt to pretend to be well informed of the Egyptian theology, tho he had not been inſtructed in the myſteries of it by the prieſts, who were alone able to inſtruct him. ORIGEN adds that not only among the Egyptians, but among all other nations, who had, beſides their religious fables, a ſecret doctrine, the religious rites were performed rationally by ingenious perſons, whilſt the ſuperficial vulgar looked no further, in the obſervation of them, than the external ſymbol or ceremony. This was a full anſwer to CELSUS: and ſo far ORIGEN makes the caſe of paganiſm and chriſtianity the ſame.

Now if they were the ſame in his time, ſure I am they are the ſame in this reſpect in ours: and

and that you may ſee this the more clearly, and learn not to paſs too raſh a cenſure on the poor Pagans, let us feign for a moment that ABAMMON, or any other heathen prieſt you pleaſe, is riſen from the dead. He is curious in the firſt place to viſit Egypt and the eaſt: but he finds them ſubdued by ignorant and barbarous people, and no traces left of their antient civility, policy, and erudition; the countries devaſted, the cities laid in ruins, and none of the colleges of the learned to be found. He haſtens away to the weſt; for he is told that in thoſe regions that border on the Atlantic ſea arts and ſciences have revived, and philoſophy has fixed her throne. As he advances thither, he finds ſome faint reſemblance of the plenty and of the magnificence of antient Egypt. Stately temples ſtrike his eye, and excite his curioſity the moſt. He obſerves that one is dedicated to the Trinity. He takes this to be ſome triad into which TYPHO had mangled the deity, and he laments that ISIS had not joined the parts again together; for he cannot be ſuppoſed to know what the nicean council has decreed for this purpoſe. He obſerves that another is dedicated to the mother of God, and imagines that CYBELE may be adored in it. Others he obſerves in great number, and all diſtinguiſhed by ſome particular invocation. Whilſt he is thus employed, a proceſſion comes by. ABAMMON ſees with pleaſure the prieſts of ISIS attend it in their white garments, and with their heads ſhaved according to

the egyptian rite; but he is at a loſs to gueſs what a croſs of wood, which is carried before them, can mean. He remembers that malefactors were executed in ſome countries on ſuch an inſtrument of cruelty; and therefore his ſurpriſe increaſes, when he is told that the ſon of God ſuffered on it to ſatisfy divine juſtice, and to expiate the ſins of mankind. This calls to his mind perhaps the human ſacrifices that were ſo long in uſe among the Phenicians, and other nations. But he is ſtill in doubt; for among them men were ſacrificed to appeaſe the gods; and here a god is the victim. He follows the proceſſion into one of the temples. The ſervice begins; he gets as near the altar as he can. He ſees no preparations for any ſacrifice, but obſerves that the prieſt holds ſomething white and round in his hand. He aſks what it is, and is told that it is a wafer. He obſerves him pour ſome liquor into a cup. He aſks, and is told that it is wine. A moment after the prieſt having held up this wafer and this cup ſucceſſively over his head, the people proſtrate themſelves in acts of adoration. They bid him do the ſame; for they aſſure him that the wafer is become the body, and the wine the blood, of God. The ſervice over, he has time to ſurvey the church. He ſees altars on every ſide, and pictures or ſtatues over all. He ſees tapers and lamps burning even by day. The pictures and ſtatues he concludes to be the gods of this people, and the tapers and lamps to have been lighted at ſome ſacred fire, at that perhaps

haps which ZOROASTER brought from heaven. He ſtares at an old man with a long beard, looking out of the clouds at a young man tied to a ſtake and whipped, and at a white pigeon hovering in the midſt of the picture. As he proceeds on his journey of curioſity, he ſees in another temple the ſame old man talking to a beautiful virgin, the virgin ſeeming to receive orders from him, and thruſting a little child head foremoſt into a mill, four monſtrous beaſts, ſuch as Africa never produced, aſſiſting twelve venerable perſons to turn the mill, before which an arch-prieſt, with a triple crown on his head, and a golden cup in his hand, is repreſented kneeling. The arch-prieſt receives wafers that fall from the mill into the cup. He gives them to a man who wears a red cap; the man of the red cap gives them to one who wears a broad pointed cap; he of the broad pointed cap gives them to one who wears a ſquare black cap; and he of the ſquare black cap doles them about to the people. ABAMMON obſerves over the door of the ſame temple an animal that has four heads, the head of a man, the head of an ox, the head of an eagle, and the head of a lion. He obſerves an aſs, to whom peculiar reſpect ſeems to be paid; and whole flocks of ſheep and whole droves of cattle. Theſe he takes for ſymbols; and they have ſo plain an alluſion to thoſe of Egypt, when Egypt was the miſtreſs of ſymbolical theology, that ABAMMON would be ready to carry himſelf back to his own age and country in imagination,

gination, if the herds of ſwine, that have their place too in this ſacred painting, did not give him a good deal of ſcandal. The people he converſes with ſwear to him in the moſt ſolemn manner that they adore one God alone, and that they abhor polytheiſm and idolatry. He hears them, takes his leave, and goes away perſuaded that they are polytheiſts as much, and idolaters more, than he or any of his fathers were. This fable may ſerve to ſhew you that it is not only unreaſonable, but unſafe to cenſure any religion raſhly, and without ſufficient information, as Pagans have caluminated judaiſm and chriſtianity, and Jews and Chriſtians paganiſm and mahometaniſm. The weapons of retaliation are always at hand, tho thoſe of defence are not: and we ſee that even the chriſtian religion is not invulnerable. But it is time I ſhould proceed to other corruptions of philoſophy, of the firſt eſpecially, and to other forms under which error has been propagated.

SECTION VI.

WHAT has been ſaid above, has been ſaid generally and hypothetically: for what man in his ſenſes would preſume to be particular or poſitive on matters of ſo great antiquity, and ſo imperfectly and darkly delivered down on authorities for the moſt part very precarious? I think, however, that it is probable. It is probable that allegory, the refuge of ignorance, the veil

veil of error, and the inſtrument of metaphyſical and theological deception in it's abuſe, was one great ſupport of paganiſm. It rendered the outſide of this religion pompous and ſhewiſh: and this was enough to raiſe and to maintain a reſpect and veneration for it in the minds of the vulgar, who never look further than the outſide, and who are fond of the marvellous. It is probable that, in the myſteries inſtituted by the firſt legiſlators to be a further ſupport of religion, ſuch allegories and ſymbols as were kept in uſe, and ſuch as were more rationally invented for inſtruction, not for deception, were explained in ſuch a manner, as to ſerve all the purpoſes of morality, and to form men to be better citizens, by making them better men, than it was thought that civil laws and inſtitutions alone could oblige them to be. It is probable, in the laſt place, that the few who were conſummated in theſe myſteries, and to whom the hidden doctrine was revealed, acknowledged the unity of the Godhead, learned to join a ſort of mitigated polytheiſm with monotheiſm, and, tho they conformed in the public worſhip, to have their private belief, as I am perſuaded that you have yours.

It is plain enough that the knowledge of the one true God would have been acquired by men, and would have been preſerved in the world, if no ſuch people as the Jews had ever been: and nothing can be more impertinent than the hypotheſis,

theſis, that this people, the leaſt fit perhaps on many accounts that could have been choſen, was choſen to preſerve this knowledge. It was acquired, and it was preſerved, independently of them, among the heathen philoſophers; and it might have become, nay it did probably become, the national belief in countries unknown to us, or even in thoſe who were fallen back into ignorance before they appear in the traditions we have; juſt as it became the firſt principle of religion among the inhabitants of the theban dynaſty *, who held that there was no God but one, and this one God was repreſented under a human figure by ſome, with an egg, the ſymbol of the world, coming out of his mouth; with a ſcepter and a belt in his hand, and with other emblems. Thus he was deſcribed by PORPHYRY, as EUSEBIUS relates: and what other Being can we underſtand to be meant by this deſcription but that God who ſpake, and the world was made?

THUS the theology of the heathen was founded on original truth, but was corrupted afterwards, as other theologies have been, in it's progreſs, and by the extenſions of it. The heathens, at leaſt all of them who deſerve to be quoted, acknowledged one ſole Supreme Being, the oldeſt of all beings, according to THALES, becauſe unmade or unproduced, that is, ſelf-exiſtent,

* PLUT. De ISIDE et OSIRIDE.

and

and becauſe he alone is ſo *. But then they corrupted their ideas of the majeſty of this Being, by thoſe which they had of human majeſty; for, by meaning to think with more reverence, they thought unworthily of God. They loſt ſight of him, if I may be allowed ſuch an expreſſion, and ſuffered inferior imaginary beings to intercept a worſhip due to him alone. They reaſoned ſo little, or ſo ill, on other notions much better aſſociated with this notion of a God, ſuch as thoſe of omniſcience, of omnipreſence, and of that energy of omnipotence which is ſufficient by one ſimple act of the will, for thus we muſt ſpeak to ſpeak intelligibly, to create and govern an univerſe, that they thought it much more agreeable to nature and truth to account for all the phaenomena of the phyſical and moral worlds by ſuppoſing the agency of ſecond and third gods, of ſuper-celeſtial and celeſtial divinities, and of demons, than to have recourſe to the firſt God, who dwelled in darkneſs impenetrable, or in light that blinded the human ſight: for both theſe images were employed, and both ſignify the ſame thing. Thus they attempted to reconcile monotheiſm with a ſort of mitigated polytheiſm; for ſuch, at leaſt, I think it was rendered by thoſe conſummated in the myſteries, and ſuch I called it before; tho PLUTARCH ſays expreſsly, in the place I have juſt now quoted, not only that the moſt antient Egyp-

* DIOG. LAER.

tians held the unity of God, but alſo that they believed no mortal could be a God; which opinion was ſufficient of itſelf to degrade numberleſs beings, that went under the vague and equivocal denomination of gods.

THIS ſyſtem, made up of monotheiſm and of ſomething very near akin, nearer than they who held it imagined, to a polytheiſm, inconſiſtent with the former, proved itſelf to be a very rank ſoil: and immenſe crops of error ſprung up from it, of error more ingenious and more plauſible than the ſuperſtitious opinions of ſavage nations, but yet as real. Tho the belief of many inferior gods did not deſtroy the belief of one ſupreme, it maintained however a ſort of idolatrous worſhip, ſince it maintained a ſort of polytheiſm. For as we cannot ſuppoſe that the vulgar, the uninitiated, adored the true God even intentionally, ſo we cannot ſuppoſe that the initiated, nor even the conſummated, held conſtantly in mind ſome ſuch caſuiſtical diſtinction as that of latria and dulia, when they offered ſacrifices to other divinities, and invoked them directly. That learned man CUDWORTH ſeems to think more favorably even of the vulgar, ſomewhere in his famous fourth chapter: and I am not ignorant that the doctrine of a mediation between God and man was eſtabliſhed in the heathen theology. But I know too that the ſuſpicion I have may be juſtified by the example of Chriſtians, who hold a mediation likewiſe:

wiſe: and of theſe the former ſeem the moſt excuſable. The Chriſtian believes that he may have acceſs at all times to the throne of grace; but the poor heathen, filled with a religious horror, durſt not approach the divine monarch, except through the mediation of his miniſters. Etherial and aërial demons ſtood in the loweſt rank of ſuperior powers. To theſe he addreſſed himſelf, if they were evil to ſoften their malice, if they were good to obtain their mediation with the celeſtial, and by them with the ſuper-celeſtial gods. He, who durſt not preſume to think that the prayers of men could reach to theſe, might offer up ſacrifices and prayers to thoſe.

PHILOSOPHERS and prieſts, who led the multitude in matters of ſcience and religion, were the ſame men in Egypt and the antient kingdoms of the eaſt for many ages, how much ſoever they were diſtinguiſhed in later times, and in other countries. Whilſt they continued ſuch, they profited alternately, in one character, of what they did in another. Philoſophers in proſe and verſe helped to fill the calendar of the prieſts: and theology became the aſſiſtant of philoſophy wherever ſhe was wanted. Thus, in the caſe before us, when philoſophers had once eſtabliſhed a divine monarchy, at the head of which they placed the firſt God, enthroned in darkneſs, or hid by exceſs of light, creating and governing all things by ſeveral orders of inferior beings, there was a ſort of gradation formed

from man to God moſt inconſiſtently with ſome other of their notions. In favor of this gradation, and to make it appear the ſhorter, the ſouls of men were deemed immortal and of a celeſtial origin. They were raiſed up, at leaſt, to the very confines of divinity: and demons, and beings ſuperior to demons, had little precedence above them, if any. They were confined indeed to human bodies, and degraded to animate theſe ſyſtems of organiſed matter by a temporary union with them, but they returned afterwards to their proper and kindred ſtars. The others were confined too, and had their reſpective powers and provinces allotted to them in the general government even of ſublunary affairs.

Theology did not fail to build on foundations philoſophy had laid: and the profeſſors of both improved the opportunity they had of feigning a cloſe correſpondence between heaven and earth. They aſſumed that they had the means of knowing what was decreed above, that they could diſcloſe the will of the gods, avert their anger, procure their favor, and exerciſe a coercive power over demons. They imagined ſpirits that belonged to the ſeveral planets, fiery and aërial, aquatic and terreſtrial: ſo that men, and not men alone, but all other animals, plants, metals, and ſtones, partook of theſe different natures, and of the different influences which deſcended from above. The diſtinction of good and

and evil demons was extremely uſeful in accounting for the phyſical and moral phaenomena; and it doubled the fees of the prieſts. Accordingly, this diſtinction had been eſtabliſhed in the remoteſt antiquity, when philoſophers did what they do ſtill, and, inſtead of tracing cauſes up gradually from their effects, take the leſs laborious taſk of inventing them at once and by a ſally of imagination. JUSTIN the martyr found our chriſtian devil precipitated from heaven, in the nineteenth book of HOMER's Iliad. PLUTARCH quotes EMPEDOCLES for writing that the evil demons had been driven from thence by the gods: and you may have the word of MARSILIUS FICINUS, in his Diſſertation on the Apology of SOCRATES, that PLATO had heard in Egypt that JUPITER caſt the impure demons into hell, as well as he had learned from PHERECYDES of Syros, either by tradition or by his writings, how ſeveral of theſe ſpirits had rebelled againſt God under the conduct of OPHIONEUS. Theſe reprobate ſpirits became the inſtruments, or rather the authors of all phyſical and moral evil: and the protection of ſuch as had not fallen from this purity was ſought, to prevent or remove this malignant influence. The one procured to men peace of mind, and health of body. The others inſpired luſts, inflamed paſſions, and, entering into the bodies of men as well as of other animals, tormented and diſtorted their limbs, and plaid a thouſand extravagant pranks in the wantonneſs of their power and malice.

Such abſurdities as theſe, and many others which I will not take the trouble to collect, being grafted on a few true principles, compoſed the theological wiſdom of the Egyptians and the Chaldeans, and corrupted the whole maſs. I ſay their theological, for their political and moral wiſdom deſerves to be mentioned without a ſneer. The relations of it, and of the effects of it, which we find in Herodotus, Diodorus Siculus, and other antient authors, inſpire us with admiration and reſpect: and it is not poſſible to account for the folly and madneſs of men on theſe theological ſubjects, who were ſo reaſonable and ſo wiſe on all others, except by reſolving it into the vanity of philoſophers and the craft of prieſts. If theſe men had pretended to none of this chimerical knowledge, but had contented themſelves to teach, in the ſimplicity of truth, the little we are able to know of the divine nature and the firſt philoſophy, their ſyſtems, which they had the rage of extending, would have been too narrow for their vanity; and their wealth, which they had the rage of increaſing by this lucrative trade, would have been too little for their avarice.

It is hard to ſay which was greater, the impudence of their pretenſions, the art with which they conducted them, or the ſucceſs they had in impoſing them on mankind. The ſky was ſpread, like the great volume of fate, before them. They

and

and their adepts alone could read in it, and diſcover the ſecrets it contained. The whole myſtery of celeſtial influences was known to them alone. They could procure them, remove them, change them, and fix them to certain portions of matter, or even fix the ſpirits themſelves, who directed theſe influences, to ſtatues prepared by the rules of their magical art. They had myſterious methods of diſentangling the ſoul from corporeal incumberments, and preparing it for every kind of ſupernatural illumination. The mind was compoſed for prophetic dreams, the eyes were ſtrengthened for celeſtial viſions. They received inſpiration, and they contemplated the gods that gave it. How they underſtood this contemplation, how they ſaw the forms of the gods *, and how the preſence of the gods was declared to them, might be explained, perhaps, in much as intelligible a manner as the preſence of demons in their ſtatues was explained. Suppoſe "a wall of looking-glaſs, and ſo diſpoſed at "the ſame time as to occaſion an echo †. Your "figure and your voice too will be reflected from "it, and you will be in ſome ſenſe in that wall." I hurry over all theſe impertinences, and I conclude by ſaying, that from this conſpiracy of philoſophy and theology in the eſtabliſhment of theurgic and natural magic have proceeded all the

* Praeſentiam ſaepe divi ſuam declarant. Saepe viſae formae deorum. Cic. De nat. deor. Lib. ii.

† Mars. Ficin.

folly and knavery of judicial aſtrology, of horoſcopes, of ſpells, of charms, of talifmans, of wizards, of witches, and of roſycrucians, and all the enthuſiaſm, blaſphemy, and ſuperſtition that have accompanied theſe excommunicated perſons and things, and that might have been reproached with great reaſon, upon many occaſions, to the orthodox perſons themſelves who excommunicated both. I ſay might have been reproached, and I ſay it with reaſon; ſince many of the opinions which theſe orthodox perſons hold, or have held, may be traced up through the ſame ſchools, through which the greateſt extravagancies of aſtrologers, magicians, and roſycrucians have deſcended to theſe days. But we muſt not ſtop here. We muſt purſue the propagation of error in higher inſtances than theſe, and in ſuch as prevail under ſome form or other even at this day, even among men the moſt enlightened in our enlightened age.

Pagan theiſts, who deemed it too great preſumption to worſhip the Supreme Being, might well have thought it ſtill more preſumptuous to dogmatiſe about his nature and attributes: and ſince they held the unity of the firſt cauſe of all things, they ſhould have ſeen the abſurdity and inconſiſtency of analyſing this monad into ſeveral principles, and of aſſuming other ſuper-celeſtial and ſuper-eſſential beings. All this was done however, the abſurdity was put in practice, and the inconſiſtency was admitted into the

firſt

firſt philoſophy. Reaſon was overborne in this caſe by affections and paſſions, as reaſon is in almoſt every caſe where that rational animal man is to decide; and exceſſive curioſity and exceſſive vanity prevailed againſt the plaineſt dictates of common ſenſe. God has proportioned, in every reſpect, our means of knowledge to our ſtation here, and to our real wants in it. The bodies, that ſurround us, operate continually on us: and their operations concern not only our well or ill being, but our very being. We are fitted therefore to acquire, by the help of our ſenſes properly employed, by experiment and induſtry, ſuch a degree of human knowledge about them, as is ſufficient for the neceſſary uſes of human life, and no more. In like manner, the knowledge of the Creator is on many accounts neceſſary to ſuch a creature as man: and therefore we are made able to arrive, by a proper exerciſe of our mental faculties, from a knowledge of God's works to a knowledge of his exiſtence, and of that infinite power and wiſdom which are demonſtrated to us in them. Our knowledge concerning God goes no further. We are in abſolute ignorance of the real eſſence and inward conſtitution of every ſenſible object. How much leſs reaſon is there to expect any knowledge of the manner of being, and of the nature and eſſence of the inviſible God, or of his phyſical and moral attributes, beyond that which his works, the effects of his nature and attributes, communicate to us! This degree, this ſufficient degree

of knowledge concerning God is a fixed point, on one ſide of which lies atheiſm, and metaphyſical and theological blaſphemy too often on the other.

NOTWITHSTANDING this which has been ſaid, and which appears to be of the utmoſt evidence, philoſophers have proceeded, without any regard to it, from the moſt early ages; and the whole ſum of theology has been in every age a confuſed rhapſody of diſcordant, fluctuating hypotheſes. The ſcience to which they pretended was unattainable. Their doctrines therefore, tho dogmatically taught, and implicitly received in their ſeveral ſchools, were nothing more than arbitrary hypotheſes: and hypotheſes being ſo extravagantly prolific, that one often engenders twenty, it is no wonder that the confuſion increaſed, that the more theſe doctrines were explained the darker they grew, and that the latter Pythagoricians and Platonicians were, if poſſible, leſs intelligible than their maſters, and all thoſe who had gone before them. I mention theſe particularly, becauſe they were the great theological doctors of Greece, and the great channels through which all the metaphyſical jargon, and all the ſuperſtitious opinions of antient nations, have come down to us, intermingled with ſome ſcraps of good ſenſe and of true theiſm. PLUTARCH ſays there was nothing unreaſonable, fabulous, nor ſuperſtitious in the ſacred inſtitutions of the Egyptians, from whoſe ſchools we know

know that PYTHAGORAS and PLATO derived their theology. But, on the contrary, he ſays that all of them had moral and uſeful cauſes, and hiſtorical and philoſophical meanings. But the prieſt made his court, at the expence of truth, to the prieſteſs, to whom he addreſſed his treatiſe concerning ISIS and OSIRIS: and we ſhall do better to give credit, on this occaſion, to DIONYSIUS HALICARNASSENSIS *, who confeſſes, that altho many of the Greek fables ſhewed the operations of nature by allegories, and were compoſed for conſolation under the calamities of life, for taking away perturbations of mind, for removing falſe opinions, and for other very good and commendable purpoſes, yet they are to be condemned in general, many as impious, all as pernicious; and he praiſes ROMULUS for admitting none of them.

SECTION VII.

IT may be worth while to give two inſtances of the extravagant hypotheſes which philoſophy and theology conſpired to frame, as ſoon, perhaps, as men began to turn their thoughts to theſe ſubjects; for we find ditheiſm and tritheiſm eſtabliſhed in the moſt early ages, concerning which we have any anecdotes.

THEY who believed a ſelf-exiſtent Being, the firſt intelligent cauſe of all things, muſt have be-

* Ant. Rom. Lib. ii.

lieved

lieved this Being to be all perfect. But then, as they modelled his government on an human plan, ſo they conceived his perfections, moral as well as phyſical, by human ideas; tho they did not preſume to limit the former by the latter. Thus, God was ſaid to be the firſt good; but then the general notion, or the abſtract idea, as ſome philoſophers would call it, of this good, was not only taken from human goodneſs, but was conſidered too with little or no other relation than to man, that excellent creature, the very image of his Maker, and one half of whom, at leaſt, was divine. A queſtion aroſe therefore on theſe hypotheſes. How could evil come into a ſyſtem, of which God was the author, and man the final cauſe? This queſtion made a further hypotheſis neceſſary. It was "dignus vindice no-"dus:" and another firſt God, another co-eternal and co-equal principle was introduced to ſolve it, a firſt cauſe of all evil, as the other was of all good. The conteſt between theſe independent and rival powers began by a ſtruggle, ſome have ſaid by a battle, when one of them endeavoured to reduce matter, which theſe philoſophers held to be a third principle, tho not a third God, into an orderly uniform frame and regular motion, and when the other endeavoured to maintain diſorder, deformity, irregularity, and to ſpoil, at leaſt, the great deſign. The ſame conteſt was ſuppoſed to continue in the government that commenced at the formation of the world, and phyſical or moral good and evil to

be

be produced, as one or other of theſe gods prevailed.

PLUTARCH *, who was a zealous aſſertor of this doctrine himſelf, aſſerted it to have been likewiſe that of the Magians, the Chaldeans, the Egyptians, and of every philoſopher almoſt of any note among the Greeks from PYTHAGORAS down to PLATO. He repreſents it as an opinion ſettled in the minds of men by the authority of legiſlators and divines, of philoſophers and poets, and not only as an opinion, but as an article of faith, on which ſacrifices and religious rites were eſtabliſhed. But every man has ſome favorite folly, and this was his. BAYLE himſelf is forced to confeſs that the repreſentation is exaggerated. How indeed is it poſſible to believe that ſuch numbers of reaſonable men could concur, from age to age, in ſo great an abſurdity? Some of them might, and it is probable that they did, hold an opinion very near akin to this and derived from it, but not the ſame that PLUTARCH held, and the Marcionites and Manicheans after him. This hypotheſis was mitigated by another; and, inſtead of a god unproduced and ſelf-exiſtent, an inferior being, produced and dependent, was aſſumed to be the author of evil. The preceptor of TRAJAN could not help admitting, moſt inconſiſtently with himſelf, that the two principles were not of equal force, and that the

* Lib. de ISIDE et OSIRIDE.

good

good principle was prevalent: but even further, that ZOROASTER, and by conſequence the magi, called the good principle alone God, and the evil principle a demon. This mitigated hypotheſis was adopted by orthodox Chriſtians, as the other was by heretics, and has therefore ſupported itſelf longer than the other; tho the other ſpread more among Chriſtians from the third century, and before MANES down to the ſeventh and even to the ninth, than it had ever ſpread and prevailed in the pagan world. But whatever ſucceſs theſe hypotheſes have had, when we conſider even that, which I have called mitigated, as a pagan dogma, we muſt ſay that altho it does not imply contradiction ſo manifeſtly as the other, yet it implies it as ſtrongly, and is ſtill more injurious to the Supreme Being. It implies it as ſtrongly: for to affirm that there are two ſelf-exiſtent gods independent and co-equal, who made and govern the world, is not a jot more abſurd, than it is to affirm that a God ſovereignly good, and at the ſame time almighty and alwiſe, ſuffers an inferior dependent being to deface his work in any ſort, and to make his other creatures both criminal and miſerable. It is ſtill more injurious to the Supreme Being: for if we had been to reaſon with pagan ditheiſts on their own notions, we might have inſiſted that it is no diſgrace to a prince to reign according to the conſtitution of his country jointly with another, as the ephori reigned at Sparta, and the conſuls governed at Rome, and that the ill government

vernment of his partner reflects no diſhonor on him. But that to ſay of a monarch in the true ſenſe of the word, who is inveſted with abſolute power, that he ſuffers one of his ſubjects to abuſe the reſt without controll, and to draw them into crimes and revolts, for which he puniſhes them afterwards, is the moſt injurious accuſation that can be brought. That heathen theiſts of common ſenſe reaſoned in this manner we cannot doubt: and that they did ſo I find a remarkable proof, tho a negative one, and brought for another purpoſe, in the Intellectual ſyſtem. CELSUS objected to the Chriſtians that they believed a certain adverſary to God, the devil, called in hebrew Satan, and that they affirmed impiouſly that the greateſt God was diſabled from doing good, or withſtood in doing it, by this adverſary. Now CELSUS, who made this objection to the Chriſtians, would not have made it, I think, if he himſelf had held the mitigated ditheiſm we have mentioned, whether he held the other or no.

LET us ſpeak of tritheiſm, the other inſtance propoſed to ſhew how natural theology was rendered a confuſed heap of abſurd and inconſiſtent hypotheſes, by men who preſumed to dogmatiſe beyond the bounds of human knowledge.

DR. CUDWORTH could not well conceive, no more than LA MOTHE LE VAYER, how a trinity

of divine hypoſtaſes ſhould be firſt diſcovered merely by human wit and reaſon. He would have it believed therefore a revelation to the Jews, and a tradition derived from them. But he ſupports his ſuggeſtion ill. That the Samothracians held a certain trinity of gods, which they called by an hebrew name Cabbirim, or the mighty gods; and that there are in the books of the Old teſtament certain ſignifications of a plurality in the Deity, are allegations ſo vague and inconcluſive that they prove nothing, or might be turned to prove what the learned author would have diſliked very much, to prove it ill perhaps, but as well at leaſt as they prove his ſuggeſtion. The other proof he brings may be equivocal as well as weak, in the manner in which it is expreſſed. He quotes PROCLUS for ſaying that the trinity contained in the chaldaic oracles was at firſt a theology of divine tradition, or a revelation, or a divine cabala; and he quotes the greek of PROCLUS, after which he adds, "viz. "amongſt the Hebrews firſt, and from them afterwards communicated to the Egyptians and other "nations." If PROCLUS now had ſaid all this in terms, or had ſpoke to the effect of the additional words, which I am unable to determine, not having the book at this time in my power, the proof would have been no better than either of the former. But if the additional words are not of PROCLUS, but of the doctor, the doctor ſeeming to quote PROCLUS quotes himſelf, in reſpect to the point he was concerned to ſecure, that

that this divine revelation could be made to no other nation, if it was made, than to the Hebrews.

I PROCEED now to ſay that it is not ſo hard to conceive how human wit and reaſon might, and why philoſophers did, invent the hypotheſis of a trinity, without any obligation to the Jews, who, from their exode to their return from their ſeventy years captivity, and from thence till all their books were written or reduced into a canon, borrowed much more than they lent.

THE confuſion and obſcurity of the firſt philoſophy, as it was taught in the antiquity to which we look up in this diſcourſe, was in no part greater, than in this of the trinity. They who have pretended to explain it, to improve it, and to build upon it, have only perplexed it the more: ſome, becauſe they were as chimerical as the firſt inventors; and others, becauſe they had ſome particular purpoſe to ſerve. What is unintelligible in PLATO, for inſtance, or in the fragments that we have of pythagorean doctrines, you will not perceive to grow more intelligible when you have conſulted JAMBLICHUS, PORPHYRY, PLOTINUS, any of the philoſophers of theſe ſects, or any of the chriſtian fathers who ſanctified a great deal of this heathen lore. MARSILIUS FICINUS, and the whole crowd of modern tranſlators, commentators, and collectors, will help you as little. Even CUDWORTH, the

beſt of them, leaves you where he found you, and gives you little elſe than a nonſenſical paraphraſe of nonſenſe. It was not his fault. The good man paſſed his life in the ſtudy of an unmeaning jargon; and as he learned, he taught.

If he had not been fond of giving a divine original to a doctrine that became a fundamental article of chriſtianity, he might have deduced the original of this very human hypotheſis, for ſuch it was in the pagan world, from what he had aſſerted and proved already. He had ſhewn how poets and philoſophers promoted polytheiſm by allegoriſing corporeal nature. Was it hard then to imagine that they allegoriſed incorporeal nature likewiſe? They deified ſenſible, why ſhould they not deify intellectual, objects? They increaſed the number of their gods, by deifying even mixed modes and relations: why ſhould they not do the ſame, by making ideal ſubſtances of the wiſdom and power of God, and of that divine ſpirit which they imagined to pervade all things? There was no need of inſpiration, nor any extraordinary communication to prompt them to do ſo: and it would have been matter of wonder if the whole ſyſtem of nature had not been reduced, as it was, into one body of corrupt theology, by the Egyptians and the other nations of the eaſt, and by the Greeks who philoſophiſed many centuries together on the ſame fooliſh principles.

THE habitude of erecting extravagant hypotheſes into doctrines of the firſt philoſophy, and of founding natural theology on the moſt unnatural principles, might ſeduce men eaſily into tritheiſm, without any ſuch apparent reaſon for it as they had for ditheiſm. But if they thought themſelves obliged to invent the latter in order to account for the exiſtence of evil, they ſaw that there was a neceſſity for inventing the former, in order to give an appearance of conſiſtency to the very beſt of their theiſtical ſyſtems. They had gods and demi-gods and demons enough. But none of them could be reputed firſt cauſes or principles, and three ſuch at leaſt were neceſſary to be found.

WHEN they had imagined a celeſtial, on the plan of a terreſtrial, monarchy, they found place and rank and buſineſs for all the imaginary beings that ſuperſtition had created: but they confined the monarch, like an eaſtern prince, to the inmoſt receſſes of his palace, where they ſuppoſed him to remain immoveable. They acknowledged him, very rationally, to be the ſourceof all intelligence and wiſdom and power, as well as the fountain of all exiſtence, and the ſpring of all life and motion throughout the whole extent of being. But then they imagined, very irrationally, that this unity was ſuch an immoveable eſſence as could not have acted in the formation, and as did not act in the preſervation and government, of

the world. They raiſed their notions of the divine majeſty ſo high, or, to ſpeak more properly, they refined ſo metaphyſically upon them, for they cannot be ever raiſed too high when they are kept within the bounds of our real ideas, that they placed the Supreme God not only far out of the ſight of human intellect, but even out of the reach, if I may ſay ſo, of that ſyſtem whereof they confeſſed him to be the firſt cauſe. There were, indeed, according to them, inferior generated gods, participant in ſome ſort of his wiſdom, and delegates in ſome degree of his power; but this participation and this delegation were not ſufficient: and to make ſuch a ſyſtem, as that of the univerſe, the very wiſdom and the very power of the ſupreme ſelf-exiſtent Being were neceſſary. No cauſe out of the Deity could produce ſuch effects; and all other beings with participated wiſdom and delegated power would be but ſecond cauſes at beſt, acting indeed, but acted upon, without any adequate efficacy of their own.

We may very well believe that ſome ſuch conſiderations as theſe determined the moſt antient philoſophers to aſſume a trinity of divine hypoſtaſes in the godhead; a ſecond proceeding eternally from the firſt; and a third proceeding eternally from the ſecond, or from the firſt and the ſecond: ſubſiſtencies, beings, not independent, like the good and the evil god, but diſtinct; ſubordinate, but ſubordinate within the Deity,

Deity, and far above the higheſt order of generated gods. It is probable that neither ZOROASTER, nor the magi, nor MERCURY TRISMEGIST, nor the egyptian divines, were as ingenious to abſtract and diſtinguiſh and to invent new words, as the nicean fathers, or the latter Pythagoricians and Platonicians. They might content themſelves with eſtabliſhing the general difference I have mentioned between theſe three, and all their other gods. CUDWORTH ſays that they underſtood by this trinity the godhead: and I remember to have read ſomewhere, in PLOTINUS perhaps, or in ſome other madman of that ſtamp, that there are emanations within the Deity, as well as emanations that go out of it. The ſecond of theſe gods, then, was the divine intellect perſonified, an emanation that did not emane, if you allow the term, out of the Deity. The third was the divine Spirit, another emanation, that did not emane neither. Thus the difficulties that embarraſſed theſe great divines might ſeem to be taken away; for tho the immoveable eſſence of the unity could not move, nor act, nor pervade, and become the ſoul of the world immediately, yet all this might be done by the ſecond and third perſons of the godhead, who exerted all the energy of the firſt.

THAT ſuch an hypotheſis was eſtabliſhed among the moſt antient of the heathen divines cannot be doubted, tho their doctrines are come to us in broken ſcraps very imperfectly, and

therefore very darkly. This imperfect and general knowledge is enough however to ſatisfy any reaſonable curioſity, and it leaves room enough for great ſcholars to diſpute and wrangle about particulars. Let us leave that part to them, and purſue reflections of another kind.

Some, and I think very few, of the greek philoſophers were rank atheiſts. Diagoras was one: and, if it be true that Democritus bought and inſtructed him, he might paſs eaſily from the abſurdity of believing that the viſible ſpecies of things and the ideas we receive from them are gods, to that of believing that there is no God. Theodorus was another: and he was ſo zealous in his atheiſm, that he wrote ſeveral books to maintain it. Strato was not quite ſo poſitive in the denial of any Supreme Being; but he was very poſitive that he had no need of aſſuming any to account for the making of the world. He went through all the parts of it, and pretended to ſhew that all of them were effects of natural cauſes, of matter and motion. "Naturalibus fieri aut factum eſſe dicit ponde-"ribus et motibus," ſays Tully *. Epicurus acknowledged gods, but gods ſo extremely ridiculous, that he was guilty of ſomething worſe than atheiſm, whilſt he affected theiſm, "invidiae deteſtandae cauſa," ſays the ſame Tully.

* Acad. Quaeſt. Lib. iv.

Such

Such philoſophers as theſe imagined a ſort of plaſtic nature working blindly, but neceſſarily, and requiring no ſuperior principle to direct her action. The greateſt part of the antient naturaliſts thought very differently from theſe. They eſtabliſhed a material, and an efficient, intelligent cauſe of all the phaenomena. Tho all of them believed matter eternal, they had various opinions about the material cauſe. It was to ſome an aſſemblage of all the elements maſſed and confounded and fermenting together, "ru-"dis indigeſtaque moles." To others it was ſome one ſelect element; to Thales water, or perhaps a fluid chaos; to Anaximenes air; to Archelaus air condenſed into water, the principle of Thales; or rarified into aether, the fiery principle of the Stoics. Their notions of the efficient intelligent cauſe were not more uniform than theſe: but as theſe were different manners of conceiving the ſame thing, ſo were the others. The material cauſe, under every notion of it, was matter ſtill; the efficient cauſe, under every notion of it, was intelligence ſtill: and all the notions of this kind, which theiſtical philoſophers entertained, were leſs repugnant, if I am not much deceived, than it is commonly thought. It ſeems to me that the differences between them were more apparent than real, and that they aroſe chiefly from different applications of the ſame trinitarian hypotheſis. On this foundation, much of what has paſſed for atheiſm

may be explained eaſily into theiſm. I could carry inſtances of my charity a great way up on this occaſion, to the ionic philoſophers, ANAXIMENES and ARCHELAUS for inſtance, if not to ANAXIMANDER: and if THALES, the founder of this ſchool, wants little, ANAXAGORAS, the laſt but one of his ſucceſſors, wants no, excuſe to clear him of atheiſm.

THE hypotheſis of a trinity in the godhead was brought from Egypt into Greece by ORPHEUS, whoever he was, and poſſibly by others in that remote antiquity. It is not unlikely too that this doctrine, being taught to an half ſavage people, who were unable to diſtinguiſh between gods in the godhead and gods out of it, if in truth that diſtinction was made ſo early, increaſed and confirmed their polytheiſm. But the true philoſophical age having begun much later in that country, when the Greeks, inſtead of waiting for miſſionaries from Egypt, went thither themſelves in queſt of ſcience, this hypotheſis could be little known, and leſs employed before that aera; whereas it was much in uſe afterwards, and we find the traces of it in all that theiſtical philoſophers taught. Theſe traces are obſcure and confuſed. The doctrine itſelf was ſo till PLATO appeared like the pagan ATHANASIUS, defined the myſtery, and fixed a profeſſion of faith that laſted till the chriſtian ATHANASIUS altered it. Thus we may account in part for the obſcurity and confuſion wherein we diſcover the

the traces of this doctrine. It was very obſcure and confuſed in the minds of the philoſophers themſelves. No wonder then if the references to it, and the opinions derived from it, are ſtill more ſo in the writings of men who have conveyed them down to us in fragments, and who underſtood the doctrine even leſs than theſe philoſophers *.

TULLY

* WE ſhall have no room to be ſurpriſed that the pagan doctrine of a trinity in the godhead was taught, and has come down to us, ſo confuſedly, if we conſider how confuſedly and how darkly the fathers of the three firſt centuries expreſſed themſelves on the ſame ſubject: tho the learned biſhop BULL would have made, if he could, theſe primitive fathers, all ad unum Athanaſians, and the doctrine of the church to have been exactly that of the nicean council, long before ATHANASIUS was born, or the council was held. If this doctrine has come down to us with greater preciſion, than that of the heathen philoſophers, and in an uniformity of terms, the reaſon is obvious. Antient theiſts applied their unſettled notions of this kind differently, and according to their different ſyſtems of philoſophy: they were under no common controll to enforce an uniformity of terms at leaſt: whereas, among Chriſtians, there was ſuch a controll, and men were obliged to uſe the ſame forms of words, whatever their opinions were. Their leaders indeed diſputed much, and each of them formed a party: but when they met in councils, they were obliged, ſometimes by art or intrigue, and ſometimes by the determining influence of imperial authority, to unite in terms, and to create an appearance of uniformity. Thus the chriſtian doctrine of the trinity was fixed. Different councils, it is true, made different deciſions; and reverend fathers,

TULLY makes VELLEIUS ſay that THALES was

thers, who had held one opinion in one council, changed it in another: there were therefore ſeveral orthodoxies pro tempore, if I may ſay ſo. But that which prevailed laſt has come down to us: and nothing has been neglected, not even interpolation, to make more antient fathers hold the language of thoſe who were more modern; an example of which I will quote from ERASMUS †. That learned, exact, and candid divine, not only acknowledges in many places, among a multitude of other defects, ſuch as unfairneſs, uncharitableneſs, and violence, the inaccuracy of theſe fathers in their writings; but he complains likewiſe of the interpolations and alterations which have been made in them for the purpoſe I have mentioned. St. HILARY, for inſtance, who ſpoke ſometimes of the Son of God as of a God of the ſame kind, or of the ſame nature, with his Father; which expreſſions however do not come up to a complete notion of conſubſtantiality; dared not call the Holy Ghoſt God, nor aſcribe adoration to him; either becauſe he is not called God expreſsly in ſcripture, or becauſe the ſaint thought it more neceſſary to inſiſt on the godhead of the Son, whoſe human nature made it more difficult to perſuade mankind that he was God; or elſe, finally, becauſe the claim of the Holy Ghoſt had not been yet admitted in due form by councils, who erected themſelves, as it were, into courts of honor to ſettle ranks and precedency in heaven. ERASMUS thinks that ſuch reaſons as theſe obliged HILARIUS to uſe much caution in his expreſſions; and therefore, ſpeaking of the Holy Ghoſt, he had contented himſelf to ſay, "promerendus eſt:" but ſome orthodox interpolator added, "et adorandus." Many other inſtances of corrupting the text of this writer there are, and thoſe principally where ſuch liberties ought to

† Ep. in HILARIUM.

have

was the firſt who enquired into ſuch matters; that have been taken the leaſt, as in his books De trinitate, and De ſynodis; for in them, ſays ERASMUS, he treated very difficult and very dangerous points of divinity, "periculoſae de rebus divinis difficultates."

THE ſame artifice was employed ſometimes in favor of opinions reputed heterodox, if we may believe RUFINUS, who, in defending ORIGEN againſt that bully JEROM, and that ideot EPIPHANIUS, inſiſts that ORIGEN would not have been expoſed to their cenſure if his writings had not been interpolated. But this artifice, as well as others, had a much greater, and an entire effect, when it was employed on the ſide of the orthodox; that is, of the majority, or of thoſe who made themſelves paſs for the majority. Thus it happened in the caſe of the trinity, and in many others, that chriſtian doctrines have been handed down with an appearance of uniformity, which pagan doctrines could not have.

BUT farther, if chriſtian doctrines had come down in the writings of the moſt antient fathers with ſtill leſs uniformity than they have, ſuch modern fathers as biſhop BULL would not have found it hard to make them appear entirely uniform. This he has attempted, in the caſe of the trinity, with great applauſe from the eccleſiaſtics of your church, and from thoſe of ours. He owns, for inſtance, that ORIGEN talks ſometimes too freely and ſceptically; that TERTULLIAN cared little what he ſaid, provided he contradicted his adverſary; and that two eggs are not more alike, than the expreſſions of this father to the whimſies of VALENTINIAN. He gives us LACTANTIUS for a rhetor ignorant in theology, and St. JEROM for a ſophiſt not to be relied on much. Many of their expreſſions being gnoſtical and arian, as well as thoſe of other fathers, they were not

that he aſſerted water to be the firſt principle of things,

not much in his favor; and yet, to ſave them for other purpoſes wherein their authority might be neceſſary, he diſtinguiſhes between witneſſes of the faith and interpreters of the ſcriptures: he allows them to be good witneſſes, and condemns them often as bad interpreters. He makes this diſtinction particularly when he ſpeaks of a paſſage in IRENAEUS, where this father cites a paſſage from the prophet ISAIAH to prove the divinity of the Holy Ghoſt. BULL thought ORIGEN orthodox in his opinion, tho not in his expreſſions, concerning the trinity. Few of the fathers who lived before the nicean council were ſo; and therefore BULL ſuppoſes them orthodox againſt their expreſſions, rather than proves them to have been ſo by their expreſſions. He does by them what they did by the ſcriptures, and draws them to his ſenſe, in what terms ſoever they ſignify their own. CUDWORTH thinks theſe primitive fathers heterodox in opinion, as well as in expreſſion. They muſt needs have been much in the wrong, ſince they agreed in aſſerting the ſubordination of the Son to the Father. They had taken this opinion of the Logos from the platonic philoſophy, and their whole trinity was built on the plan which PLATO had made leſs confuſed than that of other heathen trinitarians. "Uſque ad tres "hypoſtaſes, dicit PLATO, Dei progredi eſſentiam; et "eſſe quidem, dicit, Deum ſumme bonum; poſt illum au-"tem ſecundum conditorem, tertium autem mundi ani-"mam."

THE abſurdities and profanations built on ſuch notions as theſe were innumerable. He who endeavours to conſider them with attention, will find his head turn in the confuſion they create, and no preciſe diſcrimination of orthodox and heterodox poſſible to be made between them, either

things, and God the mind who framed them all out

either according to reaſon, wherein they have no foundation at all, or to goſpel revelation, wherein they have very little. They were however propagated by pagan and chriſtian theology, till metaphorical generations were thought to be real, and till the virtues and operations of the one Supreme Being were aſſumed to be diſtinct hypoſtaſes or ſubſiſtences in the divinity; as the aeons of VALENTINIAN ſignified, I preſume, no more, in the allegorical cant of the firſt chriſtian times, than virtues and affections of the divinity, which were afterwards underſtood to be real beings exiſting out of the firſt Being.

THESE doctrines were encouraged, perhaps introduced, by others, that traditional theology among the heathens, and cabaliſtical literature among the Jews, had preſerved from the moſt antient ages; and which, as wild as they were, had wanted neither knaves nor fools to vouch for them. Theſe were ſuch as ſuppoſed frequent manifeſtations of the Supreme Being to his creatures. According to theſe, he manifeſted himſelf ſometimes under the form of an angel; ſometimes a little, and but a little, differently under that of a man; both of which were called God whilſt the manifeſtation laſted. That this was ſo, we may conclude from divers paſſages of the Old teſtament, and from ſeveral egyptian traditions. Thus it became in time not hard to imagine a much more noble manifeſtation of the Supreme Being himſelf, in the appearance of the Logos or the Word, under an human form, into which God had inſinuated himſelf, and in which he remained incarnated. "Pater in me manens facit ipſe opera." The Word, that is the ſupreme reaſon, was always with God, for God alone is that ſupreme reaſon: but this reaſon ſpoke to mankind under the ſenſible image of a man, when that perſon appeared who was called the Son of

out of water †. DIOGENES LAERTIUS ſays that THALES held God to be the oldeſt of all the things that exiſt, becauſe ungenerated or unproduced; and the world to be the moſt beautiful, becauſe it was made by God §. Theſe expreſſions might induce one to think that THALES was not only the oldeſt, but the moſt orthodox of the greek philoſophers, even more ſo than the divine PLATO; and that his doctrine may ſerve as an inſtance to confirm TERTULLIAN's maxim, how precarious ſoever it be, "id verum quod primum." They might induce one to think that THALES intended the Supreme Being, whoſe ſole action in the production of things other theiſts did not acknowledge; tho they acknowledged his exiſtence. But theſe paſſages, compared with others, will rather ſerve to ſhew in how confuſed a manner the trinitarian hypotheſis led theſe philoſophers to ſpeak of God, and of the firſt efficient cauſe. BAYLE

God on account of his miraculous birth, and moſt important miſſion. Such was the Word of St. JOHN; "the "viſible image of the inviſible God." To this let us add, for the honor of humanity, and on the authority of ſcripture, that angels ſuffered themſelves to be adored by men before this manifeſtation; but that they have declined this honor ever ſince the Son of God took upon him the human nature.

† THALES, qui primus de talibus rebus quaeſivit, aquam dixit eſſe initium rerum: Deum autem eam mentem, quae ex aqua cuncta fingeret. Cic. De nat. deor. Lib. i.

§ Antiquiſſimum eorum omnium quae ſunt, Deus; ingenitus enim. Pulcherrimum mundus; a Deo enim factus eſt.

thought the text of TULLY corrupted in the paſſage concerning THALES, becauſe VELLEIUS, having ſaid that this philoſopher was the firſt, ſays immediately after that ANAXAGORAS ‖ was the firſt who taught this doctrine. There may be room for ſuch a ſuſpicion: and whatever interpretation be given to the paſſage, it will be little agreeable to the uſual clearneſs and preciſion of that great author.

WHEN we conſider that THALES had been inſtructed in the egyptian ſchools, and reflect on the opinion imputed to him by STOBAEUS, that the firſt cauſe had no action, we muſt be perſuaded that, however he ſpoke of mind, he did not intend the firſt God in the heathen trinity. He ſeems rather to have confounded nous and pſyche, mind and ſoul, the ſecond and the third god. A paſſage in DIOGENES LAERTIUS is very favorable to this notion; for in that THALES is ſaid to have held that mind, and therefore the efficient cauſe which had made all things out of water, was the ſwifteſt of things, and pervaded rapidly the univerſe *. None of theſe philoſophers preſumed to employ the firſt God as the immediate active efficient cauſe of things. They introduced therefore into their phyſiological theology the ſecond and the third gods of the zo-

‖ ANAXAGORAS, qui accepit ab ANAXIMENE diſciplinam, primus omnium rerum deſcriptionem et modum mentis infinitae vi ac ratione deſignari, et confici voluit.

* Velociſſimum mens; nam per univerſa diſcurrit.

roaſtrian

roaſtrian and orphic trinity, whom they ſometimes ſeem to diſtinguiſh, and whom they much oftener confound.

PYTHAGORAS talked, it is ſaid, of an immaterial unity, and a material duality; by which he pretended to ſignify perhaps the firſt principles of all things, the efficient and material cauſes: and yet we ſee how his doctrine is repreſented in the firſt book Of the nature of the gods. He was underſtood to have taught that God is a ſoul diffuſed through all being, and from which all human ſouls were taken †. This was called "avulſionem aetheris immortalis et divini:" and CICERO remarks, or makes his interlocutor remark, that PYTHAGORAS did not ſee how by this avulſion or diſtraction God himſelf was rent and torn, "diſcerpi ac dilacerari Deum §."

THIS pythagorean god was very like the etherial god of the Stoicians: and both of them ſignified, if my notions are right on this ſubject, which I do not preſume to affirm, tho I think them as probable as any others, the third divinity in the godhead, according to the trinitarian hypotheſis, which was certainly known to the Samian, and could not be unknown to the maſter of the portic. Theſe theiſtical naturaliſts ima-

† PYTHAGORAS——cenſuit animum eſſe per naturam rerum omnem intentum et commeantem, ex quo animi noſtri carperentur, &c.

§ DIOG. LAER.

gined

gined a ſort of plaſtic nature, as well as the atheiſtical naturaliſts; but, inſtead of ſuch a one as acted blindly and neceſſarily, they aſſumed one that acted by deſign and choice, that is, with intelligence. This mind, or intelligent ſpirit, for they were often undiſtinguiſhed, being infuſed, as it were, into all the parts of the material world, and moving and directing the whole as the human mind or ſoul moves and directs the human body, they conceived, the Stoics at leaſt conceived, the material world like a great animal endued with life, ſenſe, and intellect, according to the curious logic of ZENO, who advanced this paradox on the ſtrength of logic, for want of any better foundation, and juſt as he advanced many, and might have advanced ten thouſand more. But ſtill we muſt not imagine that air or water, or aether or fire, or the world itſelf, was God in the opinion of theſe philoſophers. No, they were theiſts: and their god was the divine ſpirit that exerted the power and energy of the father of ſpirits; their god was the mind or ſoul of their trinity, or both together. They, who looked up to the "ſublime candens" of ENNIUS, invoked JUPITER, according to this poet: and who was JUPITER? not the aether, the "ſub-"lime candens," but a being every where preſent and almighty, the father of gods and men, the lord of all things, and who governs them with his nod *.

* Aſpice hoc ſublime candens, quem invocant omnes

As extravagant as theſe doctrines may appear, you muſt not condemn them too raſhly. If ZENO lived in theſe days, he might juſtify what he taught about aether, and a divine ſpirit that acts in it and by it, by greater authorities than you apprehend perhaps. He might ſoon reconcile his opinions to thoſe of ſome chriſtian philoſophers, and ſhelter himſelf behind their orthodoxy. There are thoſe who aſcribe as much to this active, luminous, fiery aether, as ZENO did: and ſince he thought it, or rather called it, God, becauſe of the divine ſpirit whoſe vehicle it was, they would ſoon perſuade him to admit that this divine, is an incorporeal, ſpirit, without whoſe immediate action upon aether, even aether itſelf would be incapable of producing any one of the phaenomena, and not the leaſt operation could be performed in the whole extent of phyſical nature. They would perſuade him to it the ſooner, becauſe by rejecting all exiſtence, beſides ſpirit and idea, and by making his doctrines coincide with theirs in the whole, he would deliver himſelf from a moſt abſurd inconſiſtency, or from the trouble of defending it. I find, in one of the fineſt letters of SENECA *, whoſe authority concerning the tenets of ZENO, the founder of the ſect he had embraced, is deciſive, that this

JOVEM—patrem divumque hominumque—dominatorem rerum, omnia nutu regentem—praeſentem ac praepotentem Deum. CIC. De nat. deor. Lib. ii.

* Ep. LXXXVIII.

philoſopher

philoſopher denied the exiſtence of a material world, and by conſequence, one would think, of his favorite aether. PARMENIDES aſſerted one ſole ſubſtance, like SPINOZA. ZENO denied even this, ſays SENECA †. He could not believe his god, therefore, to be ſo much as cloathed with aether, unleſs he contradicted himſelf: but by taking refuge among theſe philoſophers, he might talk as if he did; he might maintain that he was ſo cloathed, and might aſſume the right they aſſume, to talk moſt learnedly of all the corporeal phaenomena without believing that they exiſt; in ſhort, he might reduce inconſiſtency itſelf into ſyſtem. SENECA, and the whole portic, might cry out that too much ſubtilty does great hurt, and is injurious to truth *: they would cry out in vain.

HAVING obſerved how THALES, PYTHAGORAS, and ZENO, the founders of three famous ſects, reaſoned about the firſt principles of things, I come to ſpeak of ANAXAGORAS. Now this philoſopher, like the reſt, held matter to be eternal. But he differed from them in his notions concerning the efficient cauſe. He did not make a plaſtic intelligent nature of mind and ſpirit, confounded into one. He did not make the ſame of ſpirit alone; as he might have done,

† —— PARMENIDI, nihil eſt praeter unum—ZENONI ne unum quidem.

* Quantum mali faciat nimia ſubtilitas, et quam infeſta veritati ſit. Ib.

ſince this ſpirit being divine, and even a third god, according to antient traditions, could want no intelligence. He did not mingle up both or either of theſe with matter, to conſtitute a ſoul of the world. He advanced a much more rational hypotheſis than any of thoſe who went before, or who came after him. DIOGENES LAERTIUS has preſerved the ſummary of it in his own words. He was the firſt, ſays this biographer, who added mind to matter, that is, he added it in a manner that neither THALES, nor any of the greek philoſophers, had imagined before him; for he writes thus in the beginning of his work: "All things were blended together, when mind "came and put them into order †, acceſſit "mens." Mind then was no part of them, no plaſtic nature working in them. Mind, the firſt efficient cauſe, was diſtinct from them, and extrinſecal to them. I determine not, whether ANAXAGORAS meant by mind the Supreme Being in his unity, without any regard to the hypotheſis of a trinity; or whether he aſſumed diſtinctly the ſecond god of this trinity, whilſt others aſſumed the third only, or confounded the ſecond with the third in their notions of a firſt efficient cauſe. In all caſes he was a more reaſonable theiſt, and eſpecially if he aſcribed the production, order, and government, of the univerſe to the one, whom others conſidered only as

† Primus hic materiae mentem adjecit, in principio operis——ſic ſcribens: Omnia ſimul erant, deinde acceſſit mens, eaque compoſuit.

the

the firſt, god; which I incline to think was his meaning.

But to what purpoſe do I comment on this paſſage, when the doctrine of Anaxagoras concerning a firſt efficient cauſe is ſo fully mentioned by Aristotle and Plutarch? The former of theſe was much more inclined to cenſure, than to approve, the opinions of other philoſophers: and yet Anaxagoras extorted his approbation, on this occaſion at leaſt, how much ſoever their opinions might differ on others. He who taught that mind or intellect was the efficient cauſe of the world, and of all order in it, appeared like a man of good ſenſe, "quaſi ſo-"brius," in compariſon with the former naturaliſts, who were a ſet of vain bablers, "vana "dicentes," ſays Aristotle *: and he adds, we know that this man was Anaxagoras. The ſame philoſopher, in another place †, lets us farther into this doctrine; for he ſays there, that according to it this mind, the firſt principle or efficient cauſe, was ſimple and unmixed; and that Anaxagoras aſcribed to it both knowledge and the beginning of motion §. Plutarch goes

* Arist. Metaph. Lib. i.

† Arist. De anima, Lib. i.

§—— Simplicem, et non miſtam, et puram eſſe, ſinceramque dixit. Atque eidem principio haec utraque tribuit, cognitionem——et motum, dicens, univerſum mentem moviſſe.

farther ‖, for he contraſts the doctrine of ANAXAGORAS, who held that matter was motionleſs till God gave it motion as well as order, with that of PLATO, who held that matter was in a diſorderly motion, and that God did nothing more than direct this motion ſo as to bring order out of confuſion. This is the ſubſtance of the paſſage: and ſurely the ionic philoſopher came nearer to orthodoxy in this caſe, than the divine PLATO, tho ſuch a platonic madman as poor DACIER may not ſcruple to aſſert, and to believe piouſly, that according to PLATO motion was imprinted on matter by the ſame ſpirit who created matter *.

IT was objected to ANAXAGORAS by ARISTOTLE, and by ſeveral chriſtian writers, that altho he acknowledged a ſupreme mind to be the efficient cauſe of all things, yet he had never recourſe to it when he could account for the phaenomena without it: that he uſed the divine intellect as a machine to remove difficulties, otherwiſe inſuperable, out of the way †; but in every other caſe he choſe rather to inſiſt on natural cauſes §, than to argue from the principles

‖ PLUT. De placit. phil. Lib. i. c. 7.

* Il a été imprimé à la matiere par le même eſprit qui l'a créée. La doctrine de PLATON.

† —— Tanquam machina utitur intellectu, etc. ARIST.

§ —— Magis caetera omnia, quam intellectum, cauſam eorum quae fiunt, ponit. ARIST.

of

of ‖ mind and reaſon. All this now means no more, than that he neither mingled logic like ARISTOTLE, nor theology like PLATO, with his phyſics: and the objection is not only abſurd in itſelf, but ſo much the more ſo, becauſe the methods of inquiring into nature, implied in it and oppoſed to that of ANAXAGORAS, are infinitely abſurd. I acknowledge, might ANAXAGORAS ſay, a ſupreme mind, that diſpoſed and ordered the whole frame of the univerſe, that gave it motion and ſet the great machine a going under the influence and direction of ſecond cauſes, which proceed and work effects according to the original impreſſions that divine wiſdom and power made uniformly on all matter, or differently on the different elements of it. Theſe original impreſſions, which proceed from the inconceivable energy of the firſt efficient cauſe, and this order of ſecond cauſes which proceeds from them, I call laws of nature. Knowledge of the firſt is wholly unattainable. I preſume therefore to ſpeak ſeldom of it, and always hypothetically. Knowledge of the ſecond may be attained in ſome degree by obſervation and experiment, and by no other means. By theſe we may riſe a little way from particular to general and more general cauſes: and within theſe bounds I confine my phyſical reſearches.

IF ANAXAGORAS held this diſcourſe, whatever cavils might be made by atomic or other

‖ —— Ex mentis rationiſque regula—— EUSEB.

philoſophers to ſome of the terms he employed, we ſhould be obliged to confeſs that he talked very rationally. Logic came into mode after his time. But logic, to ſpeak like my lord BACON, cannot reach the ſubtilty of nature; and, by catching at what it cannot hold, ſerves rather to eſtabliſh and fix error, than to open the way to truth. I may ſay too after men of the greateſt name in philoſophy, what it would become me ill to pronounce on my own authority, that ARISTOTLE rendered himſelf as ridiculous by applying logic to natural philoſophy, as DES CARTES rendered himſelf eſtimable by the application of geometry to it. As to theology, they who abuſe it by mixing it with phyſics, any farther than ANAXAGORAS did, degrade the Supreme Being in their ideas, and lead men back towards polytheiſm, or to ſomething very like it at leaſt. Which is the leſs pardonable, becauſe it is done wantonly, as it were, and without any apparent motive but impertinent curioſity, or as impertinent vanity. They are unable to conceive how body can act at all, and therefore they ſuppoſe the immediate preſence and action of an incorporeal agent in every operation of corporeal nature. But to what purpoſe? Aether, it is ſaid, that pure inviſible active fire, permeates the hardeſt bodies; or gravitation or attraction intercedes all body, even the "minima naturae." Is not this now to aſcend high enough in the ſeries of ſecond cauſes? Or if we cannot conceive how aether performs of itſelf, and without any concurrent cauſe, the

operations, and produces the effects, which chemiſts aſcribe to it, do we hope to diſcover how mind acts on aether, or concurrently with it? Will any man, who is in his ſenſes, expect to diſcover what thoſe original impreſſions are, or how they were given by the ſupreme mind, which determine aether in this manner, and make it the ſenſible cauſe of theſe effects? I think not. They who believe that the newtonian attraction is no original nor univerſal property of matter, will do extremely well to attempt the improvement of this ſyſtem, by diſcovering the phyſical or metaphyſical cauſe of it. They who believe it ſuch a property will enquire no farther, nor agitate their minds, nor beat their brains, to diſcover the cauſe, and in hope to determine how this property was impreſſed originally on matter. A Leibnitzian, who does not believe any ſuch original univerſal property, nor any thing more than a new phaenomenon to have been diſcovered, ſhould conſequentially attempt the improvement I have juſt mentioned. But I think he would rather attempt to demoliſh by logic, what has been erected on experiment and geometry, without being able to ſubſtitute any thing ſo good in the room of it. He would require of the Newtonian to give him the ſufficient reaſon of ſuch a property in matter. He would retire from the viſible corporeal world to the intellectual world of ideas, and endeavour to make the enquiry, that he could carry on no farther in phyſics, end in metaphyſics. The Newtonian, if he

was

was wiſe, would refuſe to follow him, leſt the enquiry ſhould end, after much labor of abſtract meditation, as oddly as that of LEIBNITZ did, when he could find the ſufficient reaſon of extenſion in nothing better than non-extended ſubſtances, in thoſe ſimple beings his monades.

As it is unreaſonable to indulge the fooliſh deſire of knowing, or the impertinent deſire of appearing to know, beyond the reach and comprehenſion of our very limited faculties in all caſes, ſo it is particularly both profane, and injurious to true theiſm, to aſſume the immediate preſence and action of the Supreme Being in all the operations of corporeal nature; however the aſſumption may be palliated by metaphyſical diſtinctions, and how innocent ſoever the intentions of thoſe who make it may be. They who do this, do in effect reduce God in their ideas, notwithſtanding all the magnificent expreſſions which they employ, to be a ſort of plaſtic intelligent nature, working conſtantly on matter, if not in it. The notion is much the ſame with that which the pagans entertained. It is only leſs reverential to the Supreme Being than theirs was. They gave this employment to a third god, who was in that hypotheſis the ſecond link in that chain of being that reached down from God to man. Theſe chriſtian philoſophers and divines give it to the Supreme Being himſelf; for they profeſs that they adore this Being in his unity, and have no other God but him. We are

are forced to help our conceptions of the divine nature by images taken from human nature, and the imperfections of this nature are our excuſe. But then we muſt take care not to make humanity the meaſure of divinity, and much more not to make the laſt the leaſt of the two. When we have raiſed our idea of any human excellency as high as we are able, it remains a very limited idea. When we apply it to God, we muſt add to it therefore our negative idea, or our notion of infinity; that is, we muſt not confine it by the ſame, nor ſuppoſe it confined by any limitations whatever. Thus when we ſpeak of the world the work of God, we muſt not conceive it to have been made by a laborious progreſſion, and to have remained at laſt imperfect like the works of men. We muſt conceive on the contrary, as well as we can, that God willed it to exiſt, and it exiſted; that he wills it to continue, and it continues, diſtinct from the workman, like any human work, and infinitely better fitted by the contrivance and diſpoſition of it to anſwer all the purpoſes of the divine architect, without his immediate and continual interpoſition. To think otherwiſe is to meaſure divinity by a more ſcanty meaſure than humanity; and, becauſe we cannot conceive how the operations of this vaſt machine are performed, to account for them by ſuppoſing it, in this inſtance, leſs perfect than a machine of human execution. Carry a clock to the wild inhabitants of the Cape of good hope. They will ſoon be convinced that intelligence made it: and

and none but the moſt ſtupid will imagine that this intelligence is in the hand that they ſee move, and in the wheels that they ſee turn. Thoſe among them, who pretend to greater ſagacity than the reſt, may perhaps ſuſpect that the workman is concealed in the clock, and there conducts inviſibly all the motions of it. The firſt of theſe hottentot philoſophers are, you ſee, more rational than atheiſts; the ſecond are more ſo than the heathen naturaliſts; and the third are juſt at a pitch with ſome modern metaphyſicians.

THE ſame objection was puſhed by PLATO againſt ANAXAGORAS on this farther conſideration, that, by inſiſting on ſecond cauſes alone, he neglected the contemplation of final cauſes, and to "penetrate the deſigns of that Supreme "Spirit who governs the world; whilſt SO-"CRATES undertook to explain all nature by the "fitneſſes and unfitneſſes of things, and rather "to give men great views, and to elevate their "minds, than to inſtruct them in natural phi-"loſophy *." I have touched this ſubject, I believe, already in part, and enough to ſhew, after my lord BACON, that the method ANAXAGORAS took, and our modern philoſophers have purſued with ſo much honor to themſelves, and ſo much benefit to mankind, tended to the advancement of real knowledge; whereas the contrary method tended to obſtruct, and did really

* DACIER on the doctrine of PLATO.

obſtruct

obſtruct it. But in this place, and without repeating what has been ſaid before, I muſt examine the objection in another view, and ſhew by a compariſon of the two methods, that SOCRATES and PLATO, who were in all things the ſame, as PLUTARCH ſays *, ſubſtituted fantaſtic in lieu of real knowledge, and corrupted ſcience to the very ſource; that of the firſt philoſophy in a particular manner, and by ſuch aſſumptions, and ſuch a method of reaſoning, as continue the taint to this day.

THEY diſcovered a firſt intelligent cauſe, as ANAXAGORAS had done, à poſteriori, that is, by the only true way by which we are able to make this diſcovery. The reflections which SOCRATES made on the creatures, as we learn from XENOPHON †, demonſtrated to him that the Creator of the world was not chance. It might have been expected from the character of SOCRATES, that he would have confined his ſpeculations to the ſame principle of reaſoning, or have controlled them by it. But he did the contrary. XENOPHON, who took minutes of his diſcourſes, accuſed PLATO of corrupting the doctrine of their common maſter; and DIOGENES LAERTIUS ſays that PLATO aſcribed to him many things which he never taught. This writer quotes for it even the authority of SOCRATES himſelf; for he relates that when this philoſo-

* De placit. phil. † De memorab.

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pher heard the Lyſis read, he cried out, "Oh "HERCULES! how many things does this young "man feign of me?" But notwithſtanding theſe teſtimonies, and without entering into the quarrel between XENOPHON and PLATO, like GELLIUS, ATHENAEUS, and others, it would be eaſy to prove by ſeveral authorities, and even by that of XENOPHON, that if SOCRATES did not ſay all that PLATO made him ſay, yet he advanced many points of doctrine much more improper to be ſubjects of enquiry, than many which he forbid to be made ſuch. In ſhort, tho he is ſaid to have drawn philoſophy from the clouds, and tho he did in fact prefer the ſtudy of morality to that of phyſics, yet he mounted to the clouds himſelf, and loſt himſelf in them. How could he do otherwiſe, when he declared that the two offices of philoſophy are the contemplation of God, and the abſtraction of the ſoul from corporeal ſenſe *? Men, who are preſumptuous and mad enough to think themſelves capable of ſuch contemplation and ſuch abſtraction, may well begin their enquiries out of the bounds of human knowledge: and they who do ſo, run a great riſque of getting never into them. Such were theſe famous philoſophers: and that you may the better comprehend their method, I chuſe to ſet it before you in the light in which it ſtands in the Phaedo. You will ſee it there, and perhaps it is the only thing

* STANLEY from PLATO.

worth

worth obſerving in the whole dialogue, with this advantage, that the method of reaſoning à priori is contraſted with that of reaſoning à poſteriori.

In the account which PHAEDO gives of the diſcourſe SOCRATES held, immediately before his death, concerning the immortality of the ſoul, two objections that were made to him are mentioned. It was objected that the ſoul, being nothing more than a kind of harmony reſulting from the compoſition of the body, inſtead of laſting longer than the body, muſt decay with it, and even periſh before it. In the next place, the ſoul having been compared to a taylor, who makes himſelf ſeveral ſuits of cloaths, and wears them out one after another, the objector urges that ſhe may wear out herſelf at laſt by the fatigue of going through ſo many generations, and periſh with one body, tho ſhe has out-lived many. Such weighty objections threw the auditors, who had been convinced before by the no leſs weighty arguments of SOCRATES, into doubt and perplexity. SOCRATES felt none, as you will believe of courſe: and PHAEDO proceeds to relate how he continued the diſputation, how he convinced CEBES one of the objectors, and how he left SIMONIAS the other without a reply. In order to do this the more effectually, he thinks it neceſſary to conſider the cauſes of generation and corruption: and he ſays on that occaſion that he had been deſirous in his youth to

ſtudy

ſtudy phyſics, or the hiſtory of nature, as he calls this ſcience. Now the more he ſtudied nature that he might diſcover the cauſes of generation and corruption, and the conſtitution of human bodies, the more blind and the more ignorant it ſeems he grew: and this we ſhall believe the more eaſily ſtill, if we conſider how ſuperficially his ſcholar talks, and how groſsly he blunders too, whenever he touches theſe ſubjects, which he affects to treat as matters of amuſement rather than of ſerious application. SOCRATES became acquainted with ſecond cauſes and effects in the courſe of this ſtudy; but he could go no higher: and he remained much diſſatisfied with ſuch imperfect knowledge. He was therefore extremely rejoiced when he fell by accident on the works of ANAXAGORAS; for, that philoſopher teaching that mind or intelligence had diſpoſed and ordered, and was the cauſe of all things, he expected to find in thoſe writings the ſufficient reaſon of LEIBNITZ, not only how, but why, this mind or intelligence had diſpoſed and ordered every thing, why every thing is as it is through the whole extent of nature. But he was again wonderfully diſappointed. ANAXAGORAS proceeded on obſervation and experiment, ſuch as he was able to make, to conſider how ſecond cauſes work in the corporeal ſyſtem, and the production of the phaenomena, under the direction, and by the energy of the firſt. But he preſumed not to go up to the firſt, to diſcover how this direction was given, how this energy was communicated, nor, in a word,

a word, what the deſigns, the reaſons, and the ends of the divine architect were. SOCRATES therefore, who aimed at nothing leſs than knowledge of this kind, deſpiſed ANAXAGORAS; and, conſidering what he had a mind to know without any regard to the means he had of knowing, he deſpiſed phyſics, and reſorted to metaphyſics. There he and his ſcholar found the immaterial forms of things, eternal ideas, and incorporeal ſubſtances; by which if you ſhould aſk me what I underſtand him to have meant, I ſhould be obliged in conſcience to anſwer you as honeſt CEBES anſwered SOCRATES, per Jovem haud multum. Whatever they are, they exiſt in the divine intellect. There we may, and there we ought to contemplate them; for the Logos, or ſecond God, in the platonic trinity was an aſſemblage, a congeries, as CUDWORTH calls him, of beings crowded into one, the place of ideas in the platoniſm of MALBRANCHE, and the ſame thing to the ſoul, as the ſoul is to the body: for ſo we muſt underſtand an expoſitor and tranſlator of PLATO, or deny him any meaning at all *.

IF you would know how SOCRATES purſues this ſublime metaphyſical method of inveſtigating nature, you may pleaſe to imagine ANAXAGORAS and him in your garden, and yourſelf ſauntering between them. You admire the beauty and ſmell of one of your flowers, and you aſk

* DACIER Arg. du Phédon.

the philoſophers, what makes it ſo fine and ſo ſweet? The firſt talks to you of the figure of the flower, of the variety of colors which ſet off one another, and the ſeveral tints which run into one another and beget a pleaſing confuſion. He talks to you of the different ſtrainers through which the ſap is filtered, and of the great alterations that he has obſerved to be wrought to the taſte, as well as to the ſight and ſmell, in fruits as well as flowers, by this operation of nature. But he owns very frankly that his knowledge extends no further, and that he cannot ſo much as gueſs at the inward conſtitutions, and the real eſſences of ſubſtances. SOCRATES aſks ANAXAGORAS, whether his ſenſes do not deceive him, when they give him ideas that are not full, nor true, repreſentations of the outward objects? Whether he does not perceive that ſenſible objects are always in a flux, and never exiſt; whereas intellectual objects are permanent, and exiſt always? Whether he can pretend therefore to have any thing more, than opinion, about the former; and whether the latter alone are not objects of knowledge? Whether the intellectual contemplation of theſe is not diſturbed by the impreſſions of the other; and whether we are not kept from knowledge by taking opinion for it? Such queſtions as theſe, and many more, we may ſuppoſe that SOCRATES would aſk, according to his uſual ſtyle, in reply to the ionic philoſopher: after which he would bid you ſhut your eyes, and ſtop your noſe, if you are curious to know why the flower

is

is fine and ſweet. He would bid you raiſe your thoughts by intenſe meditation, and an abſtraction from all particulars, up to the immaterial forms, the firſt fine, and the firſt ſweet. It is by them, he would ſay, that this flower becomes fine and ſweet, juſt as a thing is big by bigneſs, or little by littleneſs, juſt as one is one by the participation of unity, and two are two by the participation of duality.

If, in the courſe of your converſation, it ſhould turn on moral ſubjects, the ſame method of reaſoning would be applied even to them. Should you aſk ANAXAGORAS what goodneſs is, or juſtice? He might bid you perhaps turn your eyes inward firſt, then ſurvey mankind, obſerve the wants of individuals, the benefits of ſociety, and from theſe particulars frame the general notions of goodneſs and juſtice. He might go a ſtep further, and add, this is human goodneſs and human juſtice, ſuch as we can comprehend, ſuch as we can exerciſe, and ſuch as the ſupreme mind has made it both our duty and our intereſt to exerciſe, by the conſtitution of the human ſyſtem, and by the relations which ariſe in it; from all which our notions of goodneſs and juſtice reſult, and are compounded. Of divine goodneſs and divine juſtice, might this philoſopher conclude, I am unable to frame any adequate notions; and inſtead of conceiving ſuch diſtinct moral attributes in the Supreme Being, we ought perhaps to conceive nothing more than this, that there are

various applications of one eternal reaſon, which it becomes us little to analyſe into attributes.

THE language of SOCRATES would be very oppoſite to this. He would bid you turn your eyes from the moral, as well as the phyſical, world to the intellectual, nor aim at knowledge where it is not to be had, but ſeek it where it is alone to be had. He would bid you diſengage your ſoul from the incumberment of your body by purification and intenſe meditation, riſe from ſenſe to pure intellect, and, deſpiſing the low drudgery that the acquiſition of particular opinions requires, aſpire to nothing leſs than general knowledge, a knowledge of the immaterial forms of things, which are antecedent to actual exiſtence, a knowledge which may be obtained in part now, and which will be complete hereafter. He would proceed and inſiſt, for this is the expreſs doctrine of the Phaedo, that when you have once mounted up to theſe eternal, independent, and unalterable ideas, you ſhould make them the foundations or firſt principles of all your reaſoning; and receive as true, or reject as falſe, whatever you obſerve to be agreeable, or repugnant to them. Thus you would become able to imitate God in the exerciſe of goodneſs, juſtice, and every other moral virtue; ſince his and your ideas of theſe virtues would be taken from the ſame originals: and SOCRATES might the better conjure you, as he conjured his auditors in the priſon, to make yourſelf as like as poſſible

poſſible to your great exemplar, the Supreme Being.

I THINK you are not extremely converſant in the works of PLATO: and you may ſuſpect therefore that I aggravate the impertinence of his doctrines. But the truth is, that as I have made ANAXAGORAS ſay nothing more than what he would, or might, have ſaid, conformably to his manner of philoſophiſing; ſo I have made SOCRATES advance nothing which the Phaedo in particular, as well as PLATO's writings in general, will not vouch. But ſince I have brought this rambling eſſay down to the founder of the academy, it is neceſſary that ſomething more ſhould be ſaid about him and his philoſophy; for his appearance, and the inſtitution of his ſchool make a moſt remarkable epocha in the hiſtory of the firſt philoſophy: ſo remarkable, and ſo neceſſary to be well ſurveyed, that we cannot otherwiſe diſcern the true origin of the firſt philoſophy, and the theology which prevails at this hour in our own country, and among all the nations of the weſt.

SECTION VIII.

SIGNS, ſymbols, ſacerdotal letters, ſacred dialects, and hieroglyphics, were employed by the egyptian and eaſtern nations, to preſerve and to perpetuate their knowledge. Strange means indeed! For how imperfectly, how darkly,

ly, how uncertainly muſt this knowledge have been conveyed both to, and from, the greek philoſophers? What preciſion or clearneſs can we imagine, for inſtance, that DEMOCRITUS could find in thoſe ethics which he is ſaid to have tranſcribed from the columns of ACICARUS in Babylonia? Theſe monuments of egyptian and eaſtern philoſophy were explained, it may be ſaid, to DEMOCRITUS, and to the other Greeks, who went into thoſe countries for inſtruction in every part of ſcience, by the brachmans, the magi, the gymnoſophiſts, and the egyptian prieſts, into whoſe colleges they were admitted, and into whoſe rites they were initiated. I believe that this was ſo. I believe that the egyptian and eaſtern maſters explained and commented the hieroglyphical or ſacerdotal text to their grecian ſcholars: and I believe further, that the ſcholars ſet up for maſters ſoon. The philoſophy they had learned, marvellous and myſtic, ſuited their genius extremely, and was particularly adapted to their humour, in ages when every man, who had pretenſions of this kind, affected to inſtitute a new ſect, or to diſtinguiſh himſelf at leaſt by ſome new hypotheſis. But what was the effect of all this? Did they become more intelligible than their maſters, or was their knowledge more real? We have in our hands the book JAMBLICHUS wrote in anſwer to the queſtions which PORPHYRY had aſked. JAMBLICHUS wrote long after the times we ſpeak of here; but his ſum of theology and theurgic knowledge was extracted

from aſſyrian and chaldean memorials, from the columns of the firſt MERCURY, and from books that contained all the doctrines of the antients concerning matters of a divine nature, which were probably the books of the ſecond MERCURY, or ſuch as went under his name; in ſhort, from the ſame ſources from whence the Greeks had ſo many centuries before derived their knowledge real and pretended. Was it grown more clear? Was it not in JAMBLICHUS, and in all the greek philoſophers, who mingled up their own conceits with thoſe of their egyptian and eaſtern maſters, as unintelligible in jargon, as the original of it all could be in hieroglyphics or ſacerdotal letters.

SUCH we may conclude was the firſt philoſophy among the Greeks, from the beginning of their philoſophical aera, which we date no higher than PHERECYDES of Syros, and THALES; dark in its original, and rendered more dark, and more confuſed, by men, who grafted inceſſantly one degree of fantaſtical knowledge on another, and who, for want of any criterion to fix their opinions, wandered into every hypotheſis which their warm imaginations, overheated by thoſe of Egypt and the eaſt, could ſuggeſt to them.

IN the midſt of this darkneſs and confuſion PLATO aroſe, about two centuries after the commencement that has been ſet of the philoſophical aera. If he diſpelled any of this darkneſs, it

was by introducing a falſe light into the firſt philoſophy, that led men oftener out of the way of truth, than into it: and as to the confuſion, which vague notions and ſyſtems of mere imagination neceſſarily produce, there was never any greater than that which aroſe in metaphyſics and theology, after platoniſm began to be dogmatically taught in the ſchool of Alexandria, and in thoſe of chriſtianity.

THIS philoſopher availed himſelf of all the fantaſtical ſcience that was then in vogue. He went into Egypt: he heard CRATYLUS, a ſcholar of HERACLITUS: he had a philoſophical correſpondence with ARCHYTAS: and, that he might improve himſelf the more in pythagorean doctrines, he went into Italy, and converſed with the principal men of that broken ſect. He was a follower and a ſcholar of SOCRATES from his youth. Neither SOCRATES, nor he, had any great claim to the honor of being firſt inventors or teachers in any part of ſcience. That the maſter reduced ſpeculation to action we cannot doubt: and TULLY, in his Academical queſtions, deſcribes him pompouſly as the firſt who called philoſophy off from objects which are placed by nature beyond our reach, and which had employed all the philoſophers before him, to the buſineſs and duty of common life, and to the conſideration of virtue and vice, of good and evil. But public and private morality, and all the rules of good government, to ſay it by the way, had been taught, long before SOCRATES, by SOLON and the other ſages

ſages of Greece: and if we compare the ſucceſs of his miſſion at Athens with that of PYTHAGORAS at Crotona, as it is repreſented by JUSTIN *, we ſhall find no reaſon to think him either the firſt or the greateſt miſſionary of natural religion. Sure it is that he devoted himſelf to this work with much ſincerity, perſeverance, and zeal; and was the martyr of a much purer doctrine than many a modern miſſionary has died for teaching. All we are to underſtand, therefore, by what is mentioned above, ſeems to be this, that he confined his leſſons of philoſophy to ethics: and even this cannot be true, if his leſſons were ſuch as PLATO repreſents them. I cannot help thinking that TULLY was more attached to SOCRATES on account of his academical, than his moral, character.

THERE was a greater ſimplicity, no doubt, in his manner of teaching, than in that of PLATO, and in the doctrines too, very probably, that he taught. When queſtions were aſked him about another world, he anſwered, with much ſimplicity, that he had never been there, nor had ever ſeen any one who came from thence. PLATO pretended to know more of the matter, and to have his knowledge from one who had been there, and whom the infernal judges had ſent to reveal what he had ſeen and heard. This idle tale was taken probably from the magi, or the

* Lib. xx.

Chaldeans,

Chaldeans, if this ERUS ARMENIUS, mentioned in the tenth book of his Politics, was one of the ZOROASTERS: and as idle as it is, it got into hiſtory, and has been recorded gravely among other ſtories of extraordinary events *. But tho the doctrines, as well as the manners, of SOCRATES were more ſimple, than thoſe of PLATO; yet we know from PLUTARCH, and even by the diſcourſes which XENOPHON, as well as PLATO, aſcribes to him, that he entertained and propagated many of thoſe theological and metaphyſical notions, which are not, moſt certainly, parts of natural theology; becauſe they cannot be neceſſarily deduced from any knowledge that we have of nature.

METAPHYSICS may be ſaid to have ſucceeded mythology and phyſics in Greece about this time, tho the name was not invented till long after. PHERECYDES, PYTHAGORAS, and PARMENIDES made ſtrong pretenſions to a ſcience of this ſort. But the firſt and the laſt founded no ſect; and that of the other was ſoon diſperſed and extinguiſhed: tho DIOGENES LAERTIUS ſays, by miſtake doubtleſs, that it continued eighteen generations. The writings of theſe philoſophers being ſoon loſt, nor any ſet of men remaining long to preſerve a body of their doctrines, PLATO and ARISTOTLE had an opportunity of decking themſelves in their plumes, and of com-

* VAL. MAX. Lib. i. MACROB. Somn. Scip.

ing

ing down to poſterity as originals on this and other ſubjects, on which they were far from being ſuch.

THE fables and the ſuperſtitious notions that prevailed among the vulgar of all ranks, in the days of polytheiſm, about their gods, became ſoon too groſs to ſatisfy thoſe who began in every country to emerge out of ignorance, and to cultivate and improve their reaſon. In vain did the philoſophers and prieſts endeavour to ſoften them to ſuch men as theſe, by all the myſtery of their myſteries, into which SOCRATES would never ſubmit to be initiated; that is, by their ſecret doctrine. Not only the unity of the Supreme Being, but the abſurdity of ſuppoſing him to exiſt a ſyſtem of matter like other material beings, was diſcovered, and the notion of a ſpiritual ſubſtance was eſtabliſhed. Whether this notion was entertained firſt of the Supreme Being, and was applied afterwards to the human ſoul; whether it was entertained firſt of the human ſoul, and was applied afterwards to the Supreme Being; or whether the idea of ſpirit and ſpiritual ſubſtance was determined exactly either by antient philoſophers, or by chriſtian fathers, as we have determined ours, if even ours is as much determined as we ſuppoſe it to be, I ſhall not enquire at this time. All I mean to obſerve is, that an intellectual world of ſubordinate and of created gods, of demons, of ſouls, and other ſpiritual inhabitants, being once aſſumed, as it

was

was together with the unity of God, if that which is demonſtrated may be ſaid in any ſenſe or on any occaſion to be aſſumed, the philoſophers did much the ſame thing in a metaphyſical, as they and the prieſts had done in a mythological, way. They made as many ſpiritual beings as they wanted, and they generated them as they could. The head of JUPITER opened, and PALLAS the goddeſs of wiſdom came out of it, according to the mythologiſts. This image was too groſs, and the fable too impertinent, to be retained. PLATO therefore refined metaphyſically upon it, and ſuppoſed, for in him it was mere ſuppoſition, a ſecond god, the Logos, the Word, the wiſdom of the firſt, an emanation proceeding from the firſt. When this metaphyſical generation by emanation was once eſtabliſhed in opinion, metaphyſics peopled heaven as faſt, as ever phyſics, by the help of mythology, had done: and it is impoſſible to conſider without aſtoniſhment, how theſe ſpiritual beings were multiplied from age to age, by pythagorician and platonic philoſophers, by jewiſh cabaliſts, and by chriſtian divines, both orthodox and heretical. A new jargon grew up to expreſs theſe chimerical notions, and very often to expreſs things of which the learned in thoſe days, as in ours, had not themſelves any notion at all. Expanſions and diffuſions of the moſt excellent nature, which PYTHAGORAS had learned from the zoroaſtrian theology to be a pure and perfect light, and which ſome of the greek philoſophers called

called an intelligent fire; proceſſions, profuſions, and extenſions of the firſt ſimple ſubſtance, ſuperior lights in the world of emanations, called ſephiroth by the Jews, aeons male and female, ſuperſubſtantial and ſubſtantial beings, numbers, ideas, words, forms, ſouls that inhabit in heaven and in the ſtars; all theſe terms were uſed, I ſay, till they paſſed for terms of a real ſcience. Thus metaphyſics conſtituted a ſort of polytheiſm, as mythology had done before: and to ſhew you how little advantage theſe refined doctrines had over the other, I will bring an inſtance which I find in Mr. SELDEN, and which is plainly an ingraftment on the metaphyſical doctrines of PYTHAGORAS and PLATO; tho it be of a later date, as it muſt needs be, ſince it is taken from the Jews, who had moſt probably no knowledge of chaldaic philoſophy till they went into captivity, nor of greek philoſophy till after the expedition of ALEXANDER. Nothing appeared more ſhocking in all the pagan mythology, than the carnal copulations of gods and goddeſſes with one another and with mortals, than their adulteries and their rapes, than gods begetting children and goddeſſes lying-in: and yet we may ſee by a paſſage of PLUTARCH, in the life of NUMA POMPILIUS, that theſe opinions were not only entertained by the vulgar, but were matters of grave ſpeculation and of theological diſpute, as much as the incarnation of the Word has been among Chriſtians: for he ſays that the egyptian doctors made this diſtinction: they held that a god

god might get a woman with child, but that a man could have no carnal commerce with a goddeſs. Now theſe copulations were carried on between ſouls in the ſpiritual world, according to the cabaliſts, thoſe famous interpreters of jewiſh theology, tho in a more decent manner, and in lawful marriage, as we learn from SELDEN *. "The cabaliſts, he ſays, aſſert, that "as a ſoul deſcends from heaven into the em-"bryo of every man, ſo a new ſoul is ſent from "above into every proſelyte of juſtice; that "which he had whilſt he was a pagan either va-"niſhing or returning." This new demand of ſouls, you ſee, required a new ſupply: and theſe ingenious metaphyſicians ſoon found one that was more than ſufficient. They imagined four palaces in heaven, where the ſouls of innumerable holy women are married to the ſouls of holy men; "and, they add, that as in marriages "here on earth, bodies copulate with bodies, "ſo, in thoſe celeſtial marriages, ſouls copulate "with ſouls, light with light †." Would not this ſample of cabaliſtical knowledge make any learned divine grieve that the ſeventy books of this kind, which ESDRAS had collected for the uſe of wiſe men, are loſt?

* De jure naturae et gen. juxta diſcip. Ebraeor. Lib. ii. cap. 4.

† Addunt ut in conjugiis hujus mundi, ſeu terreſtribus, corpora corporibus conjunguntur, ita in alterius illius, ſeu coeleſtibus conjugiis, eſſe conjunctionem animarum cum animabus, luminis cum lumine.

META-

METAPHYSICS not only ſucceeded phyſics and mythology in the manner here obſerved, and became as great a fund of ſuperſtition, but they were carried ſtill farther, and corrupted all real knowledge, as well as retarded the progreſs of it. Metaphyſicians have not been quite agreed about the nature and object of their ſuppoſed ſcience. Thoſe we have laſt mentioned may be called and diſtinguiſhed by the title, if they like it, of pneumatic philoſophers, ſince their object is ſpirit and ſpiritual ſubſtances; how ridiculous ſoever it be to imagine ſpirit leſs an object of natural philoſophy, than body. Thoſe we are about to mention may be decorated with a greek name likewiſe, and be called ontologiſts or ontoſophiſts; ſince their object is, being in the abſtract, ens quatenus ens. But the name that ſuits beſt all the parts of metaphyſics, is that of the preternatural ſcience; becauſe it is ſynonymous to chimerical ſcience. Who, indeed, but the author of nature, can ſee and know to the utmoſt extent of it? And who, that is not delirious, therefore, can preſume to ſee and know beyond it? What principles can be laid, or how can any be laid, of a ſcience that is ſuppoſed to be a firſt and univerſal ſcience, and to contain the principles of all others, which are to be deduced from it? One might think that nothing can ſhew ſo marvellouſly the wanderings of the human mind, and the prevalence of imagination over all the rational faculties, as this inveterate habit of

of dogmatiſing about ſpirit and ſpiritual ſubſtances, and even about God, the father of ſpirits. But there is ſomething ſtill more abſurd in the other part of metaphyſics. In this the foundations are laid in knowledge: foundations narrow, and in no degree proportionable to the hypotheſes raiſed upon them; but knowledge ſo real that it is intuitive, the knowledge that they have of their own ſpirits, minds, or ſouls, in a word, of their own intellectual powers. In the other, the foundations are laid in a ſuppoſition which we know, or may know, intuitively, to be falſe; for we may be as certain that the human mind cannot make the abſtractions theſe philoſophers pretend to make, as we are certain that we can walk or run, but cannot fly: and yet this whole branch of philoſophy is built on the ſuppoſition that the human mind can and does make them. Such were the numbers of PYTHAGORAS, if we know what they were: ſuch were the ideas of PLATO, and ſuch is that fantaſtic ſcience which perverts the whole order of real ſcience, by pretending to deſcend from ſcientifical and axiomatical, down to particular, knowledge, and from univerſals to ſingulars; inſtead of attempting, conformably to nature and reaſon, the very reverſe of this.

THE ſuppoſed abſtract ideas, whether ſimple or complex, were wrought up, by warm imaginations, into eternal eſſences, incorporeal ſubſtances, independent and divine beings that re-

ſided in, or with, the ſupreme intellect; and this may be properly called the firſt apotheoſis of folly *; for the ſame men ſoon imagined a ſecond. The ſecond was that of the human mind or ſoul. The human mind or ſoul was of divine original, according to PYTHAGORAS and PLATO, and returned back to the ſoul of the univerſe when it left the body; to that ſoul which is of the ſame kind and nature, "ad id "quod ejuſdem generis et naturae eſt †." Now the ſoul contracting much impurity in it's deſcent into the body, and whilſt it continues in that priſon, theſe philoſophers taught that tranſmigrations of the ſoul through ſeveral bodies ſerved not only as ſome degree of puniſhment, but likewiſe to purge it from theſe pollutions: and this was the famous doctrine of a metempſychoſis, at leaſt of PLATO's: for between his and that of PYTHAGORAS there ſeems to have been ſome difference. In one reſpect the difference is obvious enough. The metempſychoſis of PYTHAGORAS was, I think, general, and that of PLATO not. PLATO claſſed ſouls, at their going out of the bodies they had informed, into three ſorts, the incurable, the curable, and the pure. The firſt went to the devil, as we ſhould ſpeak, at once. Tranſmigration ſerved the purpoſe of the ſecond juſt as well as your purgatory, and prepared them to aſcend to their antient habitations "in domeſticas quaſi.... ſedes ‡." The

* Stultitiae apotheoſis. BACON.

† PLATO. ‡ PHOTIUS.

laſt having been purified before death, wanted no purification after it. For this reaſon it was, that the philoſophy we refer to inculcated ſo much the neceſſity of abſtracting the ſoul from matter, and of dying, during life, a philoſophical death *; the conſequence of which was regeneration, being born anew, and putting off the old man, to ſpeak in chriſtian phraſe. Thus the ſoul might be accuſtomed to contemplate in pure intellect, abſtract forms, and eternal eſſences; to retain or to recover by reminiſcence it's former knowledge of real beings, vere entium †; to riſe to that ſuper-celeſtial place, and the field of truth, where ſouls feed on divine ideas ‡. By ſuch excurſions as theſe, not unlike to thoſe that are ſo ingeniouſly feigned in the World of DES CARTES §, the ſoul may know all things intuitively, like God, in this world, and become God in another.

" ubi depoſito conſcendes corpore coelum
" Immortalis eris divus ‖."

EMPEDOCLES imagined his ſoul to be ſo pure, that a god might be ſaid to dwell in him; and on that account called himſelf a god, " ſeipſum

* JAMBLICHUS. † Ibid.

‡ In locum ſupracoeleſtem, inque campum veritatis .... elevatas, divinis ideis paſci. PHOT.

§ Le monde de DES CARTES, a critical ſatire on the carteſian philoſophy by father DANIEL the jeſuit.

‖ Carm. aurea.

" appel-

"appellavit deum *." PLATO ſoftened this, by adding modeſtly, "quantum licet homini," as much as a man may be ſo: but that great pneumatic philoſopher ATHANASIUS was bolder than PLATO, if he ſaid, what I have ſeen ſomewhere quoted from his writings, that by a participation of the ſame ſpirit we are united to the Deity †.

SECTION IX.

UPON the whole we may venture to pronounce, that metaphyſicians have always proceeded on a falſe ſuppoſition, by neglecting the real phaenomena of the human mind, and by aſcribing to it an imaginary power. We may venture to ſay, that their principles became profane and impious, when they deified their own ideas by the firſt apotheoſis I have mentioned; and that they terminated in blaſphemy, enthuſiaſm, and madneſs, when they deified their own ſouls by the ſecond. Such philoſophy as this, however, ſuited extremely well the genius, and, if I miſtake not, the deſign of PLATO. He was much more a poetical philoſopher than HOMER was a philoſophical poet: and he had the worſt grace imaginable when he baniſhed the latter out of his Utopia, whoſe writings, with no more help than his own require to fix the allegorical and myſtical ſenſes, would have done juſt as

* SEXT. EMPIRIC. adv. MATH.

† Participatione ſpiritus conjungimur Deitati.

much good in his whimſical republic. If HOMER has done no good, he has done no laſting hurt, to philoſophy; whereas PLATO, and his ſcholar ARISTOTLE, did not only impoſe much error, but diverted men from the purſuit of truth: and this they did, not only in their own age, but have continued to do it at ſeveral periods, and in ſeveral degrees, down to ours. PLATO treated every ſubject, whether corporeal or intellectual, like a bombaſt poet, and a mad theologian *, "per ambages Deorumque mini-"ſteria:" ARISTOTLE, like an ontoſophiſt and dialectician, with all the cavil † of words and captious diſputation, which ſerve to nothing more, nor better, than to exerciſe a vain and trifling ſubtilty of wit, and to prove equally well, for inſtance, that § mice gnaw, or do not gnaw, cheeſe; which is an example that SENECA brings, by way of ridicule, on ſuch philoſophers as theſe, and which might have been applied very ſtrongly to ZENO the founder of his ſect, to CHRYSIPPUS, and all the heroes of the portic. But I chooſe to confirm what I advance concerning the characters of theſe two philoſophers, in better

* Tumidus poeta, theologus mente captus. BACON De interp. nat.

† . . . Verborum cavillatio . . . et captioſae diſputationes, quae acumen irritum exercent. SEN. ep. XLV.

§ Mus ſyllaba eſt: mus autem caſeum rodit: ſyllaba ergo caſeum rodit. Mus ſyllaba eſt: ſyllaba autem caſeum non rodit: mus ergo caſeum non rodit. Ibid. ep. XLVIII.

words

words and on a better authority than my own. My lord BACON obſerves, that almoſt all the antient naturaliſts, ſuch as EMPEDOCLES, ANAXAGORAS, ANAXIMENES, HERACLITUS, and DEMOCRITUS, ſubjected mind to things *. That is, they never loſt ſight of the phaenomena of the viſible world, but made them the rule, as well as object, of their enquiries: and what is ſaid about this object of phyſics, the corporeal world, will hold equally well about the other, the intellectual. But † PLATO, he adds, ſubjected the world to thought, and ARISTOTLE even thought to words: the ſtudy of philoſophy turning into diſputation and plauſible diſcourſe, and a ſevere inquiſition after truth being laid aſide. The meaning of all which is plainly this, that theſe men turned phyſics into metaphyſics and logic; that in order to make, or to appear to make, which anſwered their end perhaps as well, important diſcoveries about the nature and truth of things, one of them had recourſe to abſtract meditation, which agitates the mind in a perpetual round, and can never terminate in certainty for want of a ſufficient criterion; and the other, to an artful uſe of words by which a learned ambiguity is main-

* Mentem rebus ſubmiſerunt.

† At PLATO mundum cogitationibus, ARISTOTELES vero etiam cogitationes verbis adjudicarunt, vergentibus etiam tum hominum ſtudiis ad diſputationes et ſermones, et veritatis inquiſitionem ſeveriorem miſſam facientibus. BACON, Parm. Teleſ. et Dem. philoſ.

tained; and the whole buſineſs of philoſophers is to tie and untie theſe verbal knots *. For theſe reaſons, and ſurely they are deciſive, the learned chancellor concludes, that their ſyſtems of philoſophy ought rather to be rejected in the whole kind, than to be refuted particularly, ſince they are the ſyſtems of men who affected to ſpeak much, and who knew little †.

It was ſaid, in the beginning of this eſſay, that the pretenſions to ſcience unattainable, which end always in fantaſtical hypotheſes, might be excuſable in thoſe who made the firſt eſſays in philoſophy, but were without excuſe in thoſe who ſucceeded them, in the courſe of philoſophical generations. The reflection was levelled, and very juſtly, at Plato and Aristotle in a particular manner. To paſs any ſuch judgment on thoſe who went before them would be very unfair; becauſe their writings are not in our hands, as thoſe of theſe two philoſophers are, if indeed the canon of Aristotle's be as well aſcertained as that of Plato's; and becauſe the little we can learn of their opinions has been delivered down to us in broken incoherent paſſages, in confuſed and inaccurate collections, and by

* Nectimus nodos, et ambiguam ſignificationem verbis illigamus, deinde diſſolvimus. Sen. ubi ſup.

† Quare hujuſmodi placita magis toto genere reprehendenda, quam proprie confutanda, videntur. Sunt enim eorum qui multum loqui volunt, et parum ſcire. Bacon, ubi ſupra.

men

men very often who did not underſtand them, or who had their reaſons for miſrepreſenting them. To conceive this the better, we need only conſider what informations we have of philoſophical ſyſtems, more modern than thoſe we ſpeak of, and given us by men who were themſelves philoſophers. I might inſtance in many, but I will content myſelf to aſk, whether he that ſhould take all his notions of ſtoiciſm from VELLEIUS, or of epicureaniſm from BALBUS, or of both from the declamation of COTTA, would do much juſtice to the portic, or to the garden of Gargettus? Theſe philoſophies were abſurd enough of themſelves; but they were made more ſo by repreſentation.

WE know, in general, that there were philoſophers in Greece of great merit before PLATO and ARISTOTLE; that PLATO borrowed from them, as well as from HOMER, without any acknowledgments of the debt, and that ARISTOTLE did his beſt to defame or deſtroy their works: for ARISTOTLE, like an ottoman prince, as my lord BACON was fond of obſerving, endeavoured to put all his brethren to death: and ſucceeded in his barbarous deſign *. Among theſe, and probably at the head of them, DEMOCRITUS may be placed. His great reputation gave occaſion to ſilly people, as great reputations do

* —— Illum ſcilicet, ottomannorum more, in fratribus trucidandis occupatum fuiſſe; quod et ei ex voto ſucceſſit. De interp. nat. et alibi.

ſometimes, to invent a thouſand ſilly ſtories of him. But of all theſe no one was more impertinent, than that of his putting out his eyes, that he might meditate with leſs diſtraction; which PLUTARCH, in his treatiſe about curioſity, ſays was falſe, but generally reported. Another, which we find in PLUTARCH's Table diſcourſe †, is much more in character. DEMOCRITUS having eat a fig which had a taſte of honey, far from ſhutting his eyes and contemplating the firſt ſweet, he ſtarted up from his table in haſte to examine the tree and the place where it grew. His maid indeed ſaved him that trouble, by owning that ſhe had put the figs in a honey-pot. But his firſt, and as it were habitual, impulſe was to make uſe of his eyes, and to examine the phaenomenon by obſervation and experiment, which he made the rule of his enquiries, the criterion of his opinions, and the foundation of all his philoſophy. "Aetatem "inter experimenta conſumpſit," he paſſed his whole life in experiments.

DIOGENES LAERTIUS witneſſeth how averſe PLATO was to this philoſopher; and in truth PYTHAGORAS was more according to his heart. But it were to be wiſhed, ſince PLATO was to have ſo great an influence on the progreſs of ſcience, and ſince his ſpirit was to poſſeſs philoſophers for ſo many ages, that he had taken his method of philoſophiſing from DEMOCRITUS

† Sympoſ. Lib. i. c. 10.

rather

rather than from the Samian. The Samian had been inſtructed, in his travels, in all the parts of philoſophy, and he brought particularly the true ſolar ſyſtem, no doubt, from his eaſtern maſters. He brought likewiſe many of their ſuperſtitious cuſtoms and opinions, and involved, like them, all his doctrines, even the plaineſt precepts of morality, in myſtery. He appears, by the accounts which we find of him in DIOGENES LAERTIUS, in PLUTARCH, in PORPHYRY, and JAMBLICHUS, to have learned among the egyptian prieſts and the magi the great ſecret of purſuing ambition under the veil of learning, wiſdom, and ſanctity; and to have formed in his travels the project which he undertook at his return to execute, the project of opening a ſchool, founding a ſect, inſtituting a religion, and governing all the greek colonies in Italy and Sicily. DEMOCRITUS travelled, like him, and went to the ſame ſchools. In this they were alike. But they differed much in the other reſpects, which could not fail to determine PLATO againſt DEMOCRITUS, and in favor of PYTHAGORAS. Neither of them were magicians, I ſuppoſe, any more than our learned friar, whom the ignorance of his age would have made to paſs for ſuch; and as the credulity of PLINY made him repreſent them and others to have been. But as DEMOCRITUS was no more a magician, than every able naturaliſt, chemiſt, and mathematician will appear in ſome ages, ſo he ſeems to have pretended to no ſupernatural ſcience and power

as PYTHAGORAS did; and much leſs, like him, to have been the delian APOLLO, or any other divine perſon cloathed with humanity and converſing with men. In his diſputes with the magi, he ſeems to have oppoſed real phyſics to imaginary metaphyſics, and his knowledge of the animal, vegetable, and mineral world, to all their dreams about the intellectual and ſpiritual. What we know of the atomical ſyſtem of this philoſopher, whether he invented it, or LEUCIPPUS, or a certain Phenician named MOSCHUS long before either of them, may ſeem little conſonant to true theiſm: and yet his animated atoms, and his intelligent and divine ſpecies, may be reconciled to it as well, as ſome opinions that very orthodox divines have advanced. Philoſophers may ſpeak too little, and too much, of the Supreme Being and firſt cauſe of all things: and neither of old, nor in our days, has the due mean been enough obſerved. Now if it does not appear that DEMOCRITUS, whoſe object was not theology, and the catalogues of whoſe works have been rather falſely lengthened than ſhortened, writ any treatiſe of that ſort, we may ſuppoſe that he made too little mention, or no mention at all, of the Supreme Being, without ſuppoſing him, for that reaſon, an atheiſt. Whereas PYTHAGORAS, who made theology his capital, reaſoned always from heaven to earth, parcelled out the divine nature into a vaſt variety of beings, intereſted it and mingled it in every thing,

and

and contrived to render phyſics a rhapſody of enthuſiaſtical opinions and fables; of which proceeding the Timaeus in PLATO is a very ſtrong and undeniable example. To conclude this compariſon, I will only add, that if DEMOCRITUS did not acknowledge the unity of a firſt intelligent cauſe, and that was objected to him by a pythagorean Platoniſt, for they grew in time to be confounded together, one might aſk that famous queſtion, Is it no matter "utrum Deum "neges, an infames?" whether you deny or defame God? The ignorance may deſerve pity: the defamation deſerves abhorrence.

IF I have ſingled out theſe two among the philoſophers who preceded PLATO, and have dwelled ſo long on their different characters and different methods of philoſophiſing, it has been to ſhew, the more ſenſibly by the contraſt, how and through what channels the wild metaphyſics and all the profane theology of the eaſt has come down principally to theſe inlightened ages of the weſt; and how, by the purſuit of unattainable knowledge, philoſophers have gone out of the true and natural road to truth, into that which has led them into error, and muſt keep them in it, by corrupting ſcience even in the firſt principles.

IT is a very true obſervation, and a very common one, that our affections and paſſions put frequently a bias ſo ſecret and yet ſo ſtrong on our

our judgments, as to make them ſwerve from the direction of right reaſon: and on this principle we muſt account, in great meaſure, for the different ſyſtems of philoſophy and religion, about which men diſpute ſo much, and fight and perſecute ſo often. But it is not ſo commonly obſerved, tho it be equally true, that as extenſive as this principle is in itſelf, ſince it extends to almoſt all mankind, the action of it in one ſingle man is ſometimes ſufficient to extend the effects of it to millions. Many a ſyſtem, and many an inſtitution, has appeared and thrived in the world as a production of human wiſdom raiſed to the higheſt pitch, and even illuminated by inſpiration, which was owing, in it's origin, to the predominant paſſion, or to the madneſs of one ſingle man. Authority comes ſoon to ſtand in the place of reaſon. Men come to defend what they never examined, and to explain what they never underſtood. Their ſyſtem, or their inſtitution, to which they were determined by chance, not by choice, is to them that rock of truth on which alone they can be ſaved from error *: they cling to it accordingly; and doubt itſelf was this rock to the academicians.

WHAT has been ſaid cannot be illuſtrated better than by the example of PLATO. He floriſhed, as we have obſerved, about two centu-

* . . . De rebus incognitis judicant, et ad quamcunque ſunt diſciplinam quaſi tempeſtate delati, ad eam tanquam ad ſaxum adhaereſcunt. Acad. quaeſt. Lib. ii.

ries

ries after the commencement of the philoſophical age in Greece; for I think that we muſt place the commencement at THALES, wherever we think fit to place the end of it. The ionic, the eleatic, the italic ſects, were already founded, and had made much progreſs and much noiſe in the learned world, by the public leſſons, whether in regular ſchools or not it matters little, and by the writings and diſputations of ſeveral great philoſophers, by whom the honor of theſe ſchools had been ſupported, their different hypotheſes improved, and their different methods of inveſtigating truth defended. I have ſaid before, that it is impoſſible to deſcend into the detail of theſe ſyſtems of philoſophy with any aſſurance: and I will add, in this place, that I have never read any pretended explanations of them attempted by modern ſcholars, even in an intelligible manner, for this is not always the caſe, which might not have been for the moſt part altered, and ſometimes contradicted entirely, on the authority of the very ſame fragments. One thing is certain, however, and we may affirm very ſafely, that the difference between attainable and unattainable, real and fantaſtic, knowledge, and between the methods that led to one or the other of theſe, was not hard to be diſcerned, after all the eſſays that had been made in every part of philoſophy, and that were ſtill making when PLATO aroſe. We may believe that there were ſome who did begin to diſcern it accordingly, how much ſoever their notions concerning

cerning the firſt philoſophy had been corrupted, and the uſe of their reaſon had been perverted, by egyptian and eaſtern prejudices. That ANAXAGORAS did, we cannot doubt; and the cenſure SOCRATES paſſes on him in the Phaedo, makes his panegyric on this head.

DEMOCRITUS paſſed his whole life, and he lived to be more than an hundred years of age, in a conſtant application to experimental philoſophy. But few there were then, or will be at any other time, who prefer ſolitude to ſociety, leiſure to power, knowledge to wealth, and ſilent, obſcure truth to talkative and glittering error, as this philoſopher did. If PLATO had followed his example, he might have made poſſibly a great revolution in the philoſophy of his own age, and might have laid poſterity under the obligation of learning from him the way to real, inſtead of being miſled by him into chimerical, ſcience. He might have ſtood like a polar ſtar to direct future generations in their enquiries after truth, inſtead of becoming an ignis fatuus, that has danced before their eyes, and has led them into error. But thoſe very diſpoſitions of mind, and that very character which hindered PLATO from following this example, procured him all the reputation he acquired, and has enjoyed ſo long. In thoſe days, as in ours, philoſophers ſought fame rather than truth; and the fooliſh applauſe of mankind could not fail to ſtrengthen that natural bias.

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THE greek philoſophers, for the moſt part, reſembled the greek hiſtorians mentioned by STRABO. PLATO did ſo moſt eminently. The hiſtorians, obſerving how fond their countrymen were of thoſe who writ fables, turned hiſtory into romance, and ſtudied to make their relations marvellous and agreeable, with little regard to truth; in which they were encouraged, after ALEXANDER's expedition into Aſia, by the difficulty of diſproving any thing they ſaid of countries ſo remote. Juſt ſo did the philoſophers in general, and PLATO in particular. They took their ideas and notions ſuperficially and inaccurately from the firſt appearances of things, and examined and verified them as little as the others did facts. Theſe ideas and notions were combined and compared by them as every man's fancy ſuggeſted: and they had, beſides theſe, in the inexhauſtible ſtorehouſe of fancy, as many entia rationis as might ſupply all their occaſions. Thus the greek philoſophy became a chaos of wild diſcordant opinions and hypotheſes concerning divine and human, intellectual and corporeal, nature; which could neither prove themſelves, nor be reconciled to one another. They were the various offspring of imagination: of imagination that affected to rove in the divine ſphere, that of poſſibility, and would not be confined to the human, that of actuality. Theſe philoſophical romances, in the light in which they appear to us, may be compared not amiſs

to

to Amadis of Gaul, to PEIRCEFORREST, and the reſt of thoſe heroical legends, which were writ in defiance of hiſtory, chronology, and common ſenſe, as the others were in defiance of nature, and real knowledge; which were the amuſements of ignorant ages, and which are feigned ſo agreeably by CERVANTES to have turned the brains of DON QUIXOTE. I apprehend that few of them had even the merit which LA CALPRENEDE claimed in favor of his Caſſandra; for he boaſted that, among the fictions it contained, there was no one which might not be deemed true conſiſtently with hiſtory: whereas in the antient philoſophical hypotheſes, how little ſoever we know of them, we know enough to be ſure that there were many opinions advanced abſolutely inconſiſtent with the nature of things, and with the dictates of right reaſon; ſuch as were not only unſupported by either, but as were contradicted by both.

I HAVE touched already the principles from whence all this reaſoning madneſs proceeded; for there is ſuch a thing: and BUCHANAN uſed the expreſſion, "gens ratione furens," very properly. The man, who walked ſoberly about in the bedlam of Paris, and believed himſelf God the Father, was certainly mad: and yet he reaſoned extremely well when he aſſured the company that the other, who called himſelf God the Son, was an impoſtor, becauſe he, who was the Father, knew him not, nor had ever ſeen him in heaven.

heaven. Thus the philoſopher, who is in ſuch haſte to arrive at general, that he neglects particular, knowledge, and takes a bold leap from a few clear and diſtinct ideas to the firſt principles of things, how well ſoever he reaſons, is mad. DES CARTES was mad whenever he did ſo: and none but FONTENELLE would have made it a proof of his ſuperiority over NEWTON, who did the very contrary. Ideas may be clear and diſtinct in the mind, and yet be fantaſtical, or have only metaphyſical reality. But ſuppoſe them as real as you pleaſe, yet to make them proper materials of general knowledge, we muſt not attempt to leap, we muſt go ſtep by ſtep, and, by a ſlow gradation of intermediate connecting ideas, from particulars to generals. Beſides, if we ſuppoſe all the ideas we have of both kinds to be in any caſe real, yet ſtill they may not be ſufficient, ſufficient I mean in number. The ſtock we have may ſerve to eſtabliſh one general axiom, but not another, more general, which we endeavour to raiſe upon it. In ſhort, he, who imagines that he can extend general knowledge by the force of pure intellect and abſtract meditation, beyond the foundations that he has laid in particular knowledge, is juſt as mad, in thinking he has what he has not, as he who thinks he is what he is not: he is juſt as mad as the architect would be, who ſhould undertake to build the roof of the houſe on the ground, and to lay the foundations in the air.

It is not enough to ſay, that Plato was an heroical poet; nor after Longinus, that he derived from Homer, as from a great ſource, very many of his doctrines. He had the genius of thoſe dithyrambic poets, who were ſaid proverbially, and with alluſion to their extravagant ſallies of imagination, never to drink water. He ſpeaks with great reſpect of a divine fury, the principal of ſublime, metaphyſical, and theological knowledge; and he was ſo full of it himſelf, that no man, a little leſs delirious than Marsilius Ficinus, and a little leſs ſimple and bigot than Dacier, can read his writings, as thoſe of a philoſopher who ſought truth in good earneſt, and meant to inſtruct rather, than to amuſe. Ficinus owns *, ſpeaking of the language of this philoſopher, that "he raves and rambles, obſerves no order, like other men, in his diſcourſe; and appears rather to be ſome prieſt or prophet, who raves, and expiates, and tranſports others into the ſame fury, than a man who goes about to inſtruct." Quintilian †

* Ad Laur. Med. prom.—furit enim interdum atque vagatur, ut vates, et ordinem interea non humanum ſervat, ſed fatidicum et divinum; neque tam docentis perſonam agit, quam ſacerdotis cujuſdam, atque vatis, partim quidem furentis, partim vero caeteris expiantis, et in divinum furorem ſimiliter rapientis.

† Multum enim ſupra proſam orationem, et quam pedeſtrem Graeci vocant, ſurgit, ut mihi non hominis ingenio, ſed quodam delphico videatur oraculo inſtructus. Lib. x. c. 1.

ſpeaks

ſpeaks to the ſame effect: and even CICERO, as partial as he was, is forced to confeſs, that his ſtyle was rather that of poetry than of proſe. Let me add, that when he ſinks from theſe imaginary heights of enthuſiaſm and falſe ſublime, he ſinks down, and lower no writer can ſink, into a tedious ſocratical irony, into certain flimſy hypothetical reaſonings that prove nothing, and into alluſions that are mere vulgariſms, and that neither explain nor inforce any thing that wants to be explained or inforced.

As the founder of the academy drew the groteſque of his theology and metaphyſics principally on the canvas that HOMER and PYTHAGORAS had ſpread for him, ſo it ſeems to me, that he propoſed much the ſame objects of ambition to himſelf, as the Samian did. I do not mean to make any ill-natured reflections on his voyages into Sicily, nor on his intrigues with DION, nor to inſiſt on thoſe which have been made. If he took a great ſum of money, it was to buy books. If he rode into Syracuſe in a gilded chariot, drawn by four white horſes, and with all the pomp of a triumph, it was to humor the tyrant he meant to reform. If he obtained a diſtrict of country in Sicily, as PLOTINUS did ſome centuries afterwards in Italy, it was with the ſame deſign, to ſet mankind an example of the moſt perfect form of government. But ſtill we muſt not think him as free from ambition, as SOCRATES ſeems to have been. He

took warning indeed from the examples of PYTHAGORAS and of SOCRATES. One taught him to moderate his political, and the other his philoſophical, zeal. But ſtill, with all this apparent moderation, he had an ambition as real as any other, tho compatible with moderation, and even leaning on the appearances of it, as on ſo many neceſſary ſupports. There is an ambition that burns as hotly under the mantle of a philoſopher, or the cowl of a monk, as in the breaſt of an hero; and that exerts itſelf as effectually, and often as hurtfully to mankind as the other. The cell of BERNARD, or that of HILDEBRAND, even before he got the papacy, was a ſcene of as much intrigue, and as many ambitious projects, as that of FERDINAND the catholic, or of CHARLES the fifth. If the characters of DIONYSIUS the elder and the younger did not ſuffer PLATO to regulate the government, and exerciſe legiſlation in Sicily, nor the dotage of the athenian commonwealth in his own country, he acquired however a much greater dominion than that of Syracuſe or of Athens, and held a much nobler and higher rank than that of tyrant or of archon. He could not perſuade his countrymen: to attempt to force them, he thought unlawful: he retired therefore into the academy, and exerciſed in that retreat, like BERNARD in his monaſtery, a far greater power, quietly and ſafely, than any that princes, or the principal men in commonwealths, could boaſt of, with all the trouble and danger to which they ſtood continually

expoſed

expoſed in their public life. His reputation, and the authority founded on it were ſuch, that appeals were made, and ambaſſadors ſent to him from different people, who ſolicited him to give them laws; a favor he beſtowed on ſome, and refuſed to others. In another part of the reſemblance between BERNARD and him, the ſaint indeed outdid the philoſopher very much. He acquired immenſe wealth to his order, as well as to his particular convent. Whereas PLATO left nothing but his philoſophy to the philoſophers of his ſect, in general: and tho he increaſed the revenues of the academy, and tho the cuſtom of obtaining further acquiſitions of wealth by the teſtamentary diſpoſitions of perſons who deſired to encourage this ſchool, prevailed from his time; yet all this would have been but a mite in the bernardine treaſury.

IN the laſt part, which I ſhall mention, of reſemblance between theſe two theologians, the pagan had vaſtly the advantage over the chriſtian. The order of the monks, inſtead of maintaining a ſuperiority over other orders, was ſoon loſt in the crowd of them; or, if diſtinguiſhed, was diſtinguiſhed only by ignorance and luxury, and the pomp of their principal men. Whereas the ſect of philoſophers did not only eclipſe all thoſe that were more antient, but outſhine and outlaſt all that were cotemporary or of later inſtitution. It ſpread into Aſia when ALEXANDER carried his arms thither, and into

Egypt under the auſpices of his ſucceſſors. Platoniſm returned back, as it were, to thoſe nations from whom the doctrines of it had been derived originally; altered indeed, but eaſily known, and therefore eagerly embraced by the true parents, becauſe of the many allegorical, enigmatical, cabaliſtical, myſtical features, which it retained of the family.

I DO not believe that PLATO was an enthuſiaſt in any other ſenſe, than you poets affect to appear ſuch when you call for inſpiration, and boaſt of the divine fury: and I could ſooner perſuade myſelf that he was never in earneſt, than that he was always ſo; for which opinion I ſhall give you my reaſons on ſome other occaſion. But ſure it is that he has made enthuſiaſts in all ages, and in all churches; in the chriſtian church particularly, the moſt ſeraphic ſaints, and the moſt extravagant heretics: of all which I ſhall have occaſion to ſpeak more at large elſewhere; for as this philoſopher had a place frequently in our converſations, the mention of him will return frequently in theſe eſſays, which are repetitions a little extended of the former, and which claim ſome of the liberty allowed in the former.

PLATONISM floriſhed in Italy as well as in Greece, in Aſia, and in Egypt: and the extravagant encomiums of SOCRATES, PLATO, and their ſchool, which we find ſo often repeated by TULLY, would be alone ſufficient to ſhew us how

how highly this philoſophy was eſteemed in the roman commonwealth. But tho it was held in this eſteem, I think that it had received at that time a blow, which made it no longer fit to be propagated with ſucceſs, as it was then taught. It was become a philoſophy for ſophiſts and rhetors only: and the dogmatical varniſh, which had impoſed at firſt, being taken off by ARCESILAUS and CARNEADES, there remained nothing in it on which the minds of men, that ſeek naturally to be determined and fixed, could reſt with complacency. Cuppeity and tableity, thoſe ridiculous abſtractions, which DIOGENES laughed at PLATO for ſuppoſing, had paſſed in the world; but to make men doubt of the exiſtence of the cup and the table, was impoſſible.

THE moſt abſurd ſyſtem, that is dogmatical, will prevail ſooner and longer, and more generally, than that of the ſecond or third academy, or that of PYRRHO did, which aroſe about the ſame time: and the dulleſt Stoician that ever was, would have perſuaded men to aſſent to this propoſition, "the world is a wiſe being *," as readily as to this, in a bright ſunſhine, "it is "now light;" much ſooner than CARNEADES would have perſuaded them to lay aſide all claim to deciſion, and to confound true and falſe in

* Nec magis approbabit nunc lucere—hunc mundum eſſe ſapientem. Cic. Acad. Quaeſt.

the claſs of probability †. It is not worth while to enter into any nice diſtinction that may be made between theſe philoſophies. It is enough for our preſent, or any other reaſonable, purpoſe, to conſider them all together as the ſyſtems, if they can be called ſyſtems, of men who entertained a perpetual ſuſpenſion of mind, denied that any certainty was to be had, and diſputed, at moſt, about probability. Such a man as TULLY, who was oſtentatious of his eloquence, might very naturally take, as he did, this part upon him *. He proteſts in his Academical queſtions againſt any imputation of oſtentation indeed; but there will be no uncharitableneſs in laying much more weight on what fell from him in the ſecond Tuſculan, where he confeſſes that the cuſtom of diſputing for and againſt every thing pleaſed him much, becauſe it was "maxima dicendi exercitatio." In ſhort, altho' the academicians choſe a much more eaſy taſk, when they undertook to refute the Stoicians and the Epicureans, and every other dogmatic ſect, than that of defending the apparent dogmas of their maſter would have been; yet it ſeems to me, that they could not have ſtood long on that foot, nor have acquired the fame, which thoſe mad-

† Philoſophiam——quae confundit vera cum falſis, ſpoliat nos judicio. Ibid.

* Si aut oſtentatione aliqua adductus, aut ſtudio certandi, ad hanc potiſſimum philoſophiam me applicavi, non modo ſtultitiam meam, ſed etiam mores, et naturam condemnandam puto.

men,

men, who ſucceeded them in the profeſſion of platoniſm, acquired.

ANTIOCHUS, the third in ſucceſſion from CARNEADES, and the laſt in the direct academic line, began to deviate from the principle and conduct of ARCESILAUS improved by CARNEADES; and, under pretence of reviving the old academy and genuine platoniſm, he taught dogmatically the doctrines he found in PLATO, and blended them with thoſe of the Portic and the Lyceum. From this time, the falſe ſublime of PLATO began to ſpeak more ſtrongly than ever to the imagination, to the affections and paſſions, and, aided by the quibbles of ZENO, and the ſubtilties of ARISTOTLE, in a ſhort time after to the prejudices of mankind. I ſpeak thus generally, becauſe platonic philoſophy, which had been confined to ſchools in Greece, in Aſia, and in Egypt, or had been cultivated by a few particular genii at Rome, became faſhionable, and ſpread more than ever, when it had re-aſſumed the gawdy dreſs of which it had been ſtripped in the academy for ſeven generations of philoſophers at leaſt. If the roman ladies were not Platonics in love, they were ſuch in philoſophical ſpeculation: and the emperors ADRIAN, ANTONINUS, and MARCUS AURELIUS, for inſtance, were as fond of the philoſophical gown, as of the imperial mantle. JULIAN was ſo, not long after them, to a degree of fanaticiſm.

SECTION

SECTION X.

WHEN I come to ſpeak of authority in matters of religion, of the chriſtian particularly, it will be proper to ſhew how platoniſm was incorporated with it; how the former ſerved to deck out the artificial theology grafted on revelation; and how the latter ſerved to perpetuate the former. Here I conſider platoniſm relatively to the effects it has had on ſcience in general: and as to them, I ſay that they have perverted the uſe of reaſon, and corrupted the firſt elements of human knowledge, or ſubſtituted ſuch as are fantaſtical in the place of ſuch as are real. Theſe firſt elements of human knowledge are the ideas we acquire, according to the eſtabliſhed order of human nature, from the very dawn of life. As we grow up we learn of courſe to examine, to compound, and to compare theſe in ſome degree or other, and ſufficiently for our ordinary uſe in the ſtations and circumſtances of life wherein we are placed. If all this be not very accurately done, as it is not always, and perhaps ſeldom, there ariſes very rarely any great inconveniency from it. But the caſe becomes extremely different in matters of higher concern, in thoſe of philoſophy, and of the firſt philoſophy eſpecially. The more complex, and the more abſtract our ideas and notions are, the more likely are we to frame or retain

tain them ill; the conſequence of which muſt be error on the moſt important ſubjects that can exerciſe the human mind. What ſhall we ſay then of a writer, who has not only propagated on theſe ſubjects fantaſtical ideas and notions for real, with an impoſing air, but has attempted to turn mankind out of the way of framing any others on every ſubject? Shall we ſay that he was the philoſophical HOMER? We ſhall trifle egregiouſly if we do. Alluſion, allegory, metaphor, and every part of figurative ſtyle is the poet's language. Figments of imagination are his ſubject. The philoſopher may ſometimes employ the former cautiouſly, and under much controll: the latter never. Reaſon muſt be his guide, and truth alone his ſubject. When they are not ſuch, tho he keeps the name, he goes out of the character: he is guilty of fraud. PLATO was eminently guilty of it: and the taint has deſcended, like that of original ſin, to his poſterity.

ALL his lineal ſucceſſors have followed the example he ſet them in ſeveral forms, according to their ſeveral talents. They attempted it even in phyſics. But error of this kind has not been eſtabliſhed, nor fixed, nor ſanctified. Corporeal nature affords a public ſtandard obvious to ſenſe, and by which every man may try the ideas and notions of another, whether they be fantaſtic or real: and for this reaſon phyſical knowledge has been in almoſt a conſtant courſe of improvement; the

the errors have been from age to age corrected; and the ſenſible phaenomena, which are the objects of it, being numberleſs, it has been vaſtly extended, as well as aſcertained, in theſe latter ages. Since the revival of experimental philoſophy, ſpeculative whimſical naturaliſts have impoſed no more than OVID, who did not mean, nor than LUCRETIUS, who did mean, to impoſe their phyſics for true philoſophy.

PLATO did his beſt to diſgrace this criterion, and to perſuade men not to truſt to it, even to verify their ſimple ideas of ſenſible objects. Metaphyſics ſuited his purpoſe better, juſt as an half light ſuits better, than a full light, the purpoſe of one who has falſe wares to vend. We have indeed in our minds a criterion of ſpiritual nature, and of matters purely intelligible. But this criterion is not as public, and as common to all men, as the other. However fantaſtical, inadequate, or confuſed and obſcure the ideas and notions of another man may appear to me, he is at liberty to affirm that they appear quite otherwiſe in his mind: and tho I may not believe him, I cannot contradict him. What can I ſay to a myſtic, who boaſts of ſpecial grace, and divine illuminations; or to a metaphyſician, who pretends to make incomprehenſible abſtractions, and to clamber up PLATO's myſtic ladder from opinion to knowledge, the knowledge of immaterial forms, more than this, I perceive no ſuch illuminations, I can make no ſuch abſtractions, I have

have no ſuch ladder? Theſe divines and philoſophers are ſtopped, like their fellow-creatures, on the very outſkirts of the intellectual world, notwithſtanding their boaſts: and if they related nothing of it more than what they have felt, ſeen, and known, they would relate nothing more than other philoſophical travellers. But as they pretend to have gone farther, they may well pretend to have felt, ſeen, and known more.

PLATO was ſuch a traveller, and the father of philoſophical lying to us, who are not acquainted with thoſe who preceded him. Thoſe who preceded him might neglect an exact determination of ideas, and a ſteady uſe of words, the ſigns of theſe ideas; which is no more than all philoſophers are apt to do: but he is to us the firſt who taught men, inſtead of diſtruſting, to renounce their ſenſes in the ſearch of truth; and, inſtead of taking their ideas from the outward impreſſions, and inward ſuggeſtions of nature, to take them from an aſſumed region of ideas, which never exiſted out of delirious brains. This doctrine, that poiſons ſcience to the very roots, is in part ſo abſurd, and in part ſo notoriouſly falſe, that we may juſtly wonder how he could miſtake the truth in one caſe, and affirm, if he really meant to affirm, and expected to be believed, directly againſt it in the other. That we cannot have knowledge of ſenſible objects, abſolute knowledge, a knowledge of the eſſences of the ſubſtances, is moſt true; not for the reaſon

he

he gives, becauſe they are in a perpetual flux, always generating, never exiſting: but becauſe we cannot diſcern by our ſenſes their inward conſtitutions and firſt qualities, nor any thing more than their effects on us. Such knowledge is relative to our ſtate, and would not be the ſame in another; it is human knowledge; no more. But ſtill it is one kind of knowledge, and very ſufficient for us. I have not an opinion, I know, that I am warmed or burned: and if chriſtianity had been never publiſhed, I ſhould have known, not believed myſelf to be a man, not a cock. As MALBRANCHE, who was tranſported by the delirium of PLATO, by that of DES CARTES, and by his own all at once, made uſe of faith to realiſe ſenſitive knowledge; ſo PLATO found in the intellectual world the forms and eſſences of ſubſtances, as well as the ideas and notions that we have of mixed modes and relations. All theſe, according to him, were fixed and permanent, eternal exemplars and divine entities, and therefore the ſole objects of ſcience. Reaſon was placed between the objects of intellect and of ſenſe. The "firſt belong to God, and to ſome "of the elect among men*." When reaſon riſes up to the firſt, it acquires the knowledge of things divine: when it deſcends to the latter, it is filled with the errors of opinion. Science is therefore "a comprehenſion of things divine by

* Intellectus autem Dei proprius, et paucorum admodum electorum hominum.

"reaſon."

" reaſon †." I take the ſubſtance of what is here ſaid from MARSILIUS FICINUS, to whoſe expoſition of PLATO's meaning there can be no objection made: and I add, that if I took the whole, the jargon would be ſtill more ſurprifing.

WHAT man, who was not in the delirium of a metaphyſical fever, and who turned his eyes coolly and ſoberly inward, has not ſeen that we know nothing of ſenſible objects but what our ſenſes diſcover to us, and our memory retains of them after they are diſcovered; and that all thoſe ideal entities, the abſtract forms of them, are the bold fictions of imagination? Who ever reflected on the operations of his mind, and did not perceive that all his ideas, or complex notions of mixed modes and relations, are the creatures of the mind, who puts them together for her uſe as experience and obſervation direct, nay arbitrarily if ſhe pleaſes; that he never diſcerned them any where but in his own mind; that they are of mere human production; and that as they are often variouſly combined or compounded by different minds, ſo they are ſeldom preſerved in any mind ſteadily and invariably? Shall we be afraid then to ſay that the doctrine of ideas in PLATO is abſurd and falſe, and that he has by teaching it corrupted the firſt elements of knowledge? It is manifeſt that he has done ſo, too manifeſt to be denied: and for

† Divinarum rerum certa comprehenſio. MARS. FICIN. ep. in Theaetetum.

this

this reaſon his admirers have endeavoured rather to accuſtom mankind to the abſurdity, by their conſtant imitations of it, than to defend it.

NOTWITHSTANDING all that has been obſerved, and much more that might have been obſerved, to ſhew the fallacy and impertinence of a philoſophy that has been ſo long admired, this philoſophy has rolled down a torrent of chimerical knowledge from pagan and chriſtian antiquity, with little oppoſition, and ſcarce any interruption, to the preſent age; for which reaſon it is as neceſſary to expoſe the futility of this philoſophy now, as it would have been many centuries ago. Not only pagan, but chriſtian theology has been derived from PLATO in great meaſure; and, as ſtrangely as that may ſound, even from HOMER too, if he imitated HOMER as much, and borrowed as much from him, as LONGINUS and others of the antients affirm. There is a certain marvellous which dazzles and ſeiſes the mind, the philoſophical as well as the unphiloſophical; and the man who thinking he underſtands, admires his own underſtanding, as well as the man who admires, becauſe he does not underſtand. This gave a great luſtre to the platonic philoſophy: and is employed in ſeaſon and out of ſeaſon, ſo as to run through almoſt every part of it. But there is ſomething more to be obſerved. PLATO affected to write ſo equivocally, and ſo inconſiſtently, according to the different ſubjects, and different characters of inter-

interlocutors, whom he introduces in his dialogues, that he might paſs either for a dogmatiſt, or a ſceptic. The latter academy took this hint; but they followed a middle courſe, denying certainty to the dogmatiſts, and maintaining probability againſt the ſceptics: in which middle courſe they could not, however, have maintained themſelves long, as it has been obſerved already. The latter Platonicians therefore aſſumed the doctrines of their maſter to be dogmatical, taught them with all their own improvements as ſuch, ſucceeded better, and laſted longer. Thus has the fame of this ſchool been preſerved, and the philoſophy been propagated, under different forms, to one uniform purpoſe, to ſeduce men out of the precincts of real knowledge.

SECTION XI.

NOT only curioſity was indulged, but vanity was gratified by it. An identity in nature, or a cognation, as the learned CUDWORTH calls it, of the divine and human mind being once eſtabliſhed, it is no wonder that the bounds of attainable and unattainable knowledge were confounded, and became undiſcernible. The farther we carry our diſcoveries concerning the animal ſyſtem wherein we have our place, the more proofs we find that all the parts of it are full of life, and ſenſe, and intelligence, in an inconceivable variety of degrees, but in ſome degree or other: and MALBRANCHE had reaſon

to ſay, " les petits animaux ne manquent pas " aux microſcopes, comme les microſcopes " manquent aux petits animaux." Now the moral effect of ſuch a ſurvey as this ſhould be, both a greater adoration of the Supreme Being, and a greater humiliation of ourſelves, who are ſo cloſely connected with the reſt of the animal kind. But the profane aſſumption we ſpeak of here, which had it's foundation in the platonic and pythagoric ſyſtems, tends to leſſen our admiration and adoration of the Supreme Being, or at leaſt the humiliation of ourſelves, by taking our thoughts off from the ſenſible connection between us and other animals, and by applying them to an imaginary connection between the divine and human nature. There are no anthropomorphites I think left: but there have been men among the moſt devout theiſts of paganiſm, and there are thoſe among chriſtian philoſophers and divines, who join God and man as abſurdly by a ſuppoſed ſimilitude of intellect, knowledge, and manner of knowing, as thoſe heretics did by a ſuppoſed ſimilitude of figure. Vanity has not only maintained this abſurdity among the followers of PLATO, but ſpread it among thoſe of different ſects. I will not turn to the extravagant paſſages of this ſort, that are to be found in the writings we have of the latter pythagorician Platoniſts. I will mention one only from thoſe of St. AUSTIN, which happens to occur to my memory, and may ſerve inſtar omnium. Nothing is ſuperior to the human ſoul, ſays that father,

father, but God. "Nihil eſt potentius——nihil eſt ſublimius. Quicquid ſupra illam eſt jam "creator eſt." This doctrine the ſaint learned, as he learned that of the divine Logos, from PLATO, or from thoſe madmen the diſciples of PYTHAGORAS and PLATO. In ſhort, the vanity of the human heart indulged itſelf in this kind of flattery ſo much, that even the Stoics borrowed the ſame notions. Human reaſon is, according to SENECA, not only a portion of the divine ſpirit immerſed in body, the ſame in God and in man, with this ſole difference, in him it is perfect, in us capable of perfection *; but it was an axiom of that ſchool, that the ſoul is divine, and all divine natures are the ſame †.

PHILOSOPHERS being thus drawn, in their own conceit, out of that claſs of beings in which the Creator had placed them, and having placed themſelves, according to their own good pleaſure, and without any other claim to it than arbitrary aſſumption, in a ſort of middle ſtate, at leaſt, between God and man, in which too they pretended themſelves able to place others by certain metaphyſical noſtrums; theſe mountebanks and their zanis were eaſily induced to imagine, that ſince their ſouls were immortal, and participant of the divine nature, they were capable of

* In corpus humanum pars divini ſpiritus merſa——diis hominibuſque communis. In illis conſummata eſt; in nobis conſummabilis.

† Divinorum una natura eſt.

knowledge of all kinds, and of wiſdom more than human, even whilſt they wore the garb of humanity. Believing themſelves wrapped up in pure intellect, whilſt they were in truth tranſported by mere imagination, they aſſumed their knowledge, like their nature, to be divine. Clogged by bodies, and confined for a time to this inferior ſyſtem, they could not enjoy the full prerogatives of their own, nor attain complete abſolute knowledge. But ſtill they enjoyed and exerciſed theſe prerogatives in a good degree, clogged and confined as they were, when they abſtracted their ſouls from their bodies by ſpiritual exerciſes and profound meditation, and roſe by this abſtraction in pure intellect up to contemplate the divine ideas, and to know, if not as much as God, yet in the ſame manner, and much more than other men. PLOTINUS, who was ſo aſhamed to wear a body, that he would never ſuffer any picture of it to be drawn, had been raviſhed more than once, as PORPHYRY affirms, to an union with the ſupreme intelligence: and he himſelf had been ſo once. It was not hard for ſuch philoſophers to believe, and to make it believed, that the knowledge unattainable by others was attainable by them; and that whilſt ordinary perſons, incumbered by body, and groveling on earth, acquired with much pains a little particular knowledge, they had the metaphyſical ſecret of riſing to univerſals.

SUCH as theſe were the men who, iſſuing from the

the ſchools of pythagoric and platonic philoſophy, diſturbed the progreſs of real knowledge, and by flattering the vanity of the human mind, turned it to fantaſtical. Heathens adopted theſe notions the more eaſily, becauſe they had already adopted thoſe of genii, of demons, of celeſtial and ſuper-celeſtial gods, who formed a chain of intelligence from the human up to the ſupreme. Chriſtians too might adopt them the more readily, becauſe they had other as undetermined ideas of cherubim and ſeraphim, of thrones, principalities, powers, and virtues, of archangels and angels, of three hierarchies, and nine choirs of celeſtial ſpirits, figments of crack-brained enthuſiaſts, ſuch as DENYS the areopagite, and the ſcholar of St. PAUL, if, in truth, there was any ſuch perſon, and if ſome pious knave did not forge the book and an author for it. Theſe notions might ſerve, as well as thoſe of the heathens, to form an intellectual chain, and a ſhort gradation of intelligence from God to man. But orthodox Chriſtians had no need of any ſuch chain. They knew by the ſcriptures, that the correſpondence between God and man was often immediate, and even intimate and familiar with his elect, and with ſuch purified ſouls as were prepared for it. They found in the Old teſtament one example of a patriarch tranſlated very corporeally into heaven, and one in the New of an apoſtle raviſhed thither, he knew not how. But the whole tenor of the ſacred writings repreſented the Supreme Being in

frequent conference with his creatures, God covenanting, or making bargains with man, and man with God; God holding the language of man, reaſoning, arguing, expoſtulating, in a very human manner, animated by human affections, and appealing to human knowledge. In ſhort, they believed farther, on the ſame authority, that the Word, the wiſdom of the Father, the very God, had been incarnated here on earth, aſſumed an human body, lived like a man with men, and died at once by their hands, and for their ſakes. It could not be hard ſurely, for thoſe who believed all this, and who were accuſtomed to think in this manner of the divinity, to be perſuaded that God knew by the help of ideas, like man, ſo cloſe was the analogy between their natures; that there were two regions of ideas, the one of ideas of ſenſe, the other of ideas of pure intellect; that the former being nothing more than repreſentations of appearances, and relative ſolely to the ſyſtem in which they aroſe, nothing more could be acquired by them than probability, and opinion founded on it, ſufficient indeed for vulgar uſe, tho not ſo for philoſophical purpoſes; but that minds illuminated by philoſophy could riſe to the higher region, in which alone certainty and ſcientifical knowledge were to be acquired, by contemplating thoſe intellectual ideas, abſtract natures, eternal eſſences, incorporeal ſubſtances, and all the objects of metaphyſics.

From ſuch fantaſtical notions we know, that men ſet out in ſearch of fantaſtical knowledge above two thouſand years ago, and how much ſooner we cannot ſay. In hopes of reaching unattainable, they neglected attainable, knowledge; ſcorned to confine themſelves to that, to which they were confined by the author of nature; and attempting to riſe above the level of humanity, they ſunk below it: for they ſurely are below it, who imagine themſelves to be what they are not, to have knowledge where they can have none, and to want it where it lies open to their induſtry.

It would have been no agreeable attempt in thoſe days, nor is it a welcome one in theſe, to fix the bounds of attainable and unattainable knowledge. The philoſophers we ſpeak of are as ridiculous in a quite contrary ſenſe, as the learned mandarins of the Chineſe. The mandarins had decided that China, a part of Tartary, the other ſtates that lay around them, and the neighbouring iſlands, contained the whole world. They knew no other, they enquired after no other, and were aſtoniſhed therefore when the jeſuits ſhewed them a map of the two hemiſpheres. The philoſophers remain unacquainted with their own country, and enquire little about it, or about thoſe that lie neareſt to it. They are wholly taken up with imaginary countries at an immenſe diſtance, where they never

were, and concerning which they can have no intelligence from any that have been there. But the abſurdity of abſurdities is this: they pronounce dogmatically, and they pretend to demonſtrate when they ſpeak of theſe unknown countries; and they ſink into doubt and hypotheſis when they ſpeak of their own.

Could philoſophers have been perſuaded to analyſe the human mind, to examine intuitively the faculties of it, and to compare them with the objects of their enquiry, the extravagant notions ſpoken of might have been ſoon exploded, the progreſs of fantaſtical knowledge might have been ſtopped early, and that of real knowledge might have been advanced without interruption.

But the ill ſtar of knowledge contrived to render this impracticable. It has been ſaid, that Aristotle was an ungrateful ſcholar to his maſter Plato. It may be ſo. But this obligation, at leaſt, the maſter had to the ſcholar: the ſcholar raiſed a miſt that hindered men from diſcerning, as they might have done ſooner or later, the abſurdity of his philoſophy: and this miſt continued thickening before the eyes of men for many ages. The Romans were far from correcting and improving the greek philoſophy. They contented themſelves to tranſlate and imitate: and the ſame ſervile manner of philoſophiſing was followed after the reſurrection of letters. A ridiculous veneration for Plato revived with them;

them: and ARISTOTLE maintained in the ſchools the empire he had uſurped every where during the dark ages of gothic, of arabian, and of eccleſiaſtical, barbarity. The antient fathers of the church had recommended theſe two philoſophies ſufficiently to more modern doctors, by their example and writings. But ARISTOTLE had helped to defend what PLATO had helped principally to eſtabliſh: and as defence grew more and more neceſſary from age to age, ſo the reputation and authority of ARISTOTLE, which were great in the mahometan, ſeemed to riſe above thoſe of PLATO in the chriſtian, ſchools of philoſophy; or at leaſt to be more employed in them. I am not ignorant that many paſſages of the fathers and other chriſtian writers may be cited againſt the peripatetic philoſophy. But theſe paſſages ſerve only to multiply proofs, that theſe venerable perſons were apt to contradict one another, and even themſelves. Cardinal PALAVICINI was very angry with father PAUL for ſaying, when he ſpeaks of the ſixth ſeſſion of the council of Trent, wherein ſo much uſe was made of the diſtinctions of the Stagyrite, that without this aſſiſtance "we ſhould have had many "articles of faith the leſs *." The cardinal denies the fact ſo little, that he juſtifies the proceeding by the example of thoſe antient councils, who did the ſame when they diſtinguiſhed ſo nicely ſubſtance, perſon, and hypoſtaſis. I know

* Noi mancavamo di molti articoli di fede. Hiſt. del con. trid. Lib. ii.

not whether it be true, tho I incline to believe it if MELANCTHON ſaid it, that the ethics of ARISTOTLE were read publicly in ſome churches inſtead of the goſpels. But every one knows, that he and his philoſophy have been ſpoken of by great divines and moſt devout perſons of the chriſtian and mahometan churches, in terms ſo hyperbolical, that they are blaſphemous.

By ſuch combinations of circumſtances, and by others that were favorable to the ariſtotelian philoſophy, a jargon of words that ſeemed to explain, without explaining, and the rules of a dialectic that ſeemed to prove, and that did prove indifferently either in favor of truth, or of error, took up the whole attention of philoſophers, and rendered it impoſſible for them to make any advances in learning and knowledge. All the rational powers of the ſtrongeſt minds were ſo miſapplied, that giants employed themſelves in picking ſtraws; and men, whoſe intellectual ſight might be compared to that of LYNCEUS, wandered about in a metaphyſical and logical miſt, always in ſearch of truth, finding it ſeldom, and miſtaking often even error for it. Fantaſtical ideas, new invented words, and new applications of old words put into a quaint ſyllogiſtical form, made up the ſum of the mirabilia, the inopinata, and the paradoxes of the Stoics. Much in the ſame manner did ſchoolmen proceed in ſubtiliſing their ideas and notions, and in turning and winding them by rules of art, without

without any concern to compare them with nature, and to verify and fix them by what is. The conſequence has been, that altho much of the cant of the ſchools is laid aſide, yet many fantaſtical or undetermined ideas and notions, and many unmeaning words, or words of vague ſignification, which grew into uſe, or were confirmed in uſe then, impoſe ſtill; and that even ſome of our fineſt writers banter themſelves and others with them. It muſt not be imagined, that he who reaſons, or ſeems rather to reaſon, cloſely and conſequentially, has therefore truth always on his ſide. To be ſure of this, we muſt be ſure that his words have ideas and notions perceivable by us, attached to them; we muſt be ſure that all theſe are ſteadily employed, and we muſt be able, by a careful analyſe of the ideas and notions, where there is the leaſt room for doubt, to diſcern whether they are fantaſtical or real, and adequate and complete, clear and diſtinct, or the contrary, relatively to the ſubjects about which they are employed. If we do this, we ſhall be neither ſeduced by declamation, nor deceived by argumentation. Some writers impoſe, as fairies and enchanters in romances are ſaid to have done: but if we do this, their charms will be broke, and either nothing, or ſomething extremely abſurd or weak, will appear, where a ſtupendous and ſolid pile preſented itſelf to our firſt ſight. If we neglect this, not only MALBRANCHE, or the biſhop of Cloyne, thoſe excellent poets, may lead us agreeably

agreeably " per ambages deorumque miniſteria," through ſuch mazes of error as none but the brighteſt genii are able to contrive; but your ghoſtly father, if you had one, might undertake to convince you by dint of logic, that when he affirms the ſame body to be at the ſame inſtant in different places, he is far from affirming, that the ſame body is and is not in the ſame place.

SECTION XII.

IT will ſound odly to ſome ears, that the right uſe of reaſon, and the right conduct of the underſtanding in the inveſtigation of truth, and the acquiſition of real knowledge, is a very late diſcovery: and yet nothing is more certain. It was not near ſo ſoon after the reſurrection of letters, as it might have been expected, that the fantaſtical and faſhionable philoſophy of PLATO and ARISTOTLE began to be exploded. Little by little, however, there aroſe men, who made this uſe of the light that increaſed gradually in the orb of ſcience. There were ſome eſſays made, faintly, diffidently, and occaſionally at firſt, like thoſe of men, who emerging out of darkneſs, were dazzled as well as enlightened; or of men, who were ſenſible that they might ſuffer for ſaying, that they had ſeen what they had ſeen, or that they knew what they knew, in oppoſition to the confirmed prejudices of mankind. Others followed with greater aſſurance, like men born

born in the light, whoſe eyes were able to bear a greater effulgence of it, and who beſides this had leſs, for even they had ſomething to fear from eccleſiaſtical, abetted by civil, power. One of theſe, and the firſt that deſerves to be named in this roll, was our VERULAM, that aſtoniſhing genius, who durſt form the deſign of rebuilding ſcience from the foundations. I preſume not to ſay how near he brought this deſign to bear, nor how practicable he left it. But this I may ſay, that the foundations were ill laid before his time; and that he laid, on the rock of nature and truth, ſuch as can alone ſupport this building. The meaneſt cottage that art ever raiſed, can reſt on no other ſafely; and the moſt ſtupendous pile of philoſophical ſyſtems may reſt on theſe immoveably. Whatever eſteem he was tempted to think, by a review of their ſcattered remains, that the more antient philoſophers of Greece might deſerve, he conſidered the works of PLATO and of ARISTOTLE, which have been alone preſerved, as the bane of philoſophy. They had been followed ſervilely from their own age to his: by which means they had ſtood as barriers againſt all improvement, and the poiſonous ſprings they had opened continued to infect all the ſtreams of knowledge. He attempted, therefore, to depoſe theſe tyrants in philoſophy, and to draw men off from the enthuſiaſm of one, and the ſophiſtry of the other, from the contemplation of confuſed and ill abſtracted ideas and notions, and from a wanton, not to ſay a fraudu-

lent,

lent, uſe of words, to the contemplation of nature, and a ſtrict regard to things. The very firſt aphoriſm of the Novum organum ſtates the only true object of human knowledge, and limits that which every man may be ſaid to have acquired, to what he has diſcovered of nature by obſervation and experience *.

HUMAN knowledge, to be real, muſt be derived from, and tried by, what really is, according to my lord BACON and to truth: and he was ſo far from indulging the licentious uſe, which philoſophers make of that dangerous power of the mind, the power of imagining what may be, and of erecting hypotheſes into ſyſtems of knowledge; that he inſiſts on the neceſſity, not that we ſhould doubt of every thing, but that we ſhould examine every thing, that we ſhould purge our minds of all thoſe idols, as he ſtyles them, thoſe falſe and ſuperficial notions that are taken from vulgar opinion, and at beſt from philoſophical rumor, which were the foundations of platoniſm, tho PLATO uſed ſome ſort of induction, and of peripateticiſm; and finally, that the mind being thus prepared to receive the direct, or reflected, rays of truth, we ſhould not reject, but aſſiſt and controll ſenſe in a courſe of learned experience; abſtract our notions from things with the utmoſt accuracy; and proceed, as far as we

* Homo, naturae miniſter et interpres, tantum facit et intelligit, quantum de naturae ordine, re, vel mente, obſervaverit: nec amplius ſcit, aut poteſt.

can proceed, in the ſame manner, to aphoriſms and axioms more and more general.

WHILST the fame of this great man was freſh, and his works were in every learned hand both at home and abroad, DES CARTES aroſe, another luminary of the philoſophical world: and I could eaſily ſuſpect that my lord BACON's writings were not unknown to him; for as little as it is pretended he uſed to read, he did not diſdain to borrow from authors of inferior note, of the ſame country: and they who repay with ample intereſt, like DES CARTES, into the common ſtock of learning, need not be aſhamed to borrow ſometimes. The french philoſopher, like the engliſh, made clear and diſtinct ideas the neceſſary materials of knowledge. But then, as he left this important article too general and too looſe, ſo whilſt he built up truth with one hand, he laid a foundation for infinite error on the other. He diſarmed the ſcholaſtics; but he furniſhed arms to the myſtics. Beſides clear and diſtinct ideas, he admits a certain inward ſentiment of clearneſs and evidence. The word ſentiment is applied in the french language ſo variouſly and ſo confuſedly, that it becomes often equivocal. But ſince it is diſtinguiſhed, on this occaſion, from idea, it muſt be meant either to ſignify that immediate perception, which the mind has of ſome ſelf-evident truth, in which caſe it is not a principle of knowledge, but knowledge itſelf, intuitive knowledge; or elſe it muſt be meant to ſignify that

that apparent evidence wherewith notions and opinions enter into the mind of one man, that are not accompanied with the ſame evidence, nor received in the ſame manner, in the mind of another. Now in this caſe, the lively inward ſentiment of DES CARTES is nothing better than that ſtrong perſuaſion, wherewith every enthuſiaſt imagines that he ſees what he does not ſee, hears what he does not hear, feels what he does not feel, and, in a word, perceives what he does not perceive. If any thing elſe be meant by ſentiment, thus diſtinguiſhed from idea, as a principle of knowledge, I confeſs myſelf unable ſo much as to gueſs what it is. But notwithſtanding this, DES CARTES holds an high rank among thoſe benefactors to mankind in the advancement of knowledge, who freed human reaſon from the chains of authority. He improved natural philoſophy by geometry, and geometry by algebra: in which reſpect he ſhewed the way to our NEWTON.

GASSENDI was another of theſe reformers of philoſophy, and the reſtorer of the atomical doctrine. He expoſed, even to ridicule, the dialectics of ARISTOTLE: he diſarmed the Peripateticians of theſe enchanted weapons; and would have completed, by his victories over them, the ſubverſion of their long eſtabliſhed empire, if he had not apprehended, with reaſon, enemies much more formidable than mere philoſophers, becauſe armed with eccleſiaſtical and civil power.

It

It is this fear, which has hindered thoſe, who have combated error in all ages, and who combat it ſtill, from taking all the advantages which a full expoſition of the truth would give them. Their adverſaries triumph, as if the goodneſs of their cauſe had given them the victory; when nothing has prevented their entire defeat, and reduced the conteſt to a drawn battle, except this, that they have employed arms of every kind, fair and foul, without any reſerve; whi ſt the others have employed their offenſive weapons with much reſerve, and have even blunted their edge when they uſed them.

If it was my deſign to ſpeak of all thoſe, who have advanced real knowledge in all its parts, ſince the reſurrection of letters, beyond ſuch of the antients at leaſt as we are acquainted with, the roll would be a long one. But my intention being to ſpeak of thoſe alone, who have ſtudied the human mind, rectified, or pretended to rectify, the errors of it, and thereby improved, or pretended to improve, our reaſon; I ſhall content myſelf to mention two that are the beſt known to me, Mr. Locke, and the author, perhaps I ſhould ſay authors, of the Logic of Port-royal.

The firſt ſteps towards a right conduct of the underſtanding, and a juſt diſcernment of unattainable knowledge, and of that which is attainable, in different kinds and degrees, are an accu-

rate analyſe of the mind, a careful review of the intellectual faculties, as well ſeparately as in their co-operations, and an attentive obſervation of the whole intellectual procedure, natural and habitual, as it has been hinted already. When this is well and truly done by any writer, the reader will feel conſciouſly that it is ſo; for he will perceive the phaenomena of his own mind to be ſuch as they are repreſented, and he will recollect that the ſame things have paſſed there, tho he has not always, or at all, obſerved them. This happens to me when I read the Eſſay on human underſtanding. I am led, as it were, through a courſe of experimental philoſophy. I am ſhewn myſelf; and in every inſtance there is an appeal to my own perceptions, and to the reflections I make on my own intellectual operations. I know that this method is diſagreeable to ſome, and I am not ſurpriſed that it ſhould be ſo. There are thoſe who think they do not want it; and they are thoſe who want it moſt. There are thoſe likewiſe who fear it; becauſe they apprehend that analyſe of ideas and notions, that compariſon of them with the real nature of things, and that ſteady preciſion in the uſe of words, which would reduce many a dogmatic ſyſtem to paſs for nothing better than a fanciful hypotheſis, as it really is.

The Logic of Port-royal will ſuit ſuch perſons as theſe, and eſpecially thoſe of the ſecond ſort much better. In whatever language or country this

this treatiſe had been publiſhed, it would have appeared to be not an art of thinking, but an art of thinking conformably to chriſtian doctrines, and to thoſe of Rome particularly. It is contrived to mangle and diſtort human reaſon, ſo as to proportion it, I do not ſay to revelation but, to theology; tho theology ſhould be proportioned to reaſon: and I add, that if reaſon could be made by abuſe to ſerve the purpoſes of this theology, it might be made by no greater, nay by the very ſame, abuſe to ſerve the purpoſes of any other, pagan or mahometan. Now this proceeding is unfair: and he who holds it means to deceive, not to inſtruct. The true art of thinking muſt be the ſame among all mankind, ſince their intellectual ſyſtem, and the things of nature from which their ideas and notions ought to be abſtracted, are the ſame. But if this example was followed, the art of thinking would vary, as the different metaphyſics of MENCIUS and DES CARTES, or the different theologies of the Bonzes and the Jeſuits, vary. Art ſhould direct practice: but thus, practice would direct art. There would be one art of thinking for Chriſtians, one for the doctors of Mecca, one for the literati in China, and ſo on.

THO I give, on this occaſion, a preference to BACON and to LOCKE over DES CARTES and the author of the Logic of Port royal, it is not from ſo mean and contemptible a motive as this would be, that they were engliſhmen. The ad-

vancement of knowledge, and the improvement of reaſon, are of common concern to all rational creatures. We are all of the ſame country in theſe reſpects: and he who thinks and acts otherwiſe, is a promoter of faction in the great commonwealth of learning. As much as I admire theſe two philoſophers, I am not blind to their errors; for even I, who have no teleſcopical eyes, can diſcern ſpots in theſe ſuns. I can diſcern a tincture, and ſometimes more than a tincture, in BACON, of thoſe falſe notions which we are apt to imbibe as men, as individuals, as members of ſociety, and as ſcholars; and againſt which he himſelf is very ſolicitous to put us on our guard. I am convinced, more by his example than by what he ſays, that theſe falſe notions render the admiſſion of truth into the mind more difficult, and the hold of error more ſtrong. I can diſcern, in Mr. LOCKE, ſometimes ill abſtracted and ill determined ideas, from which a wrong application of words proceeds, and propoſitions to which I can by no means aſſent. I confeſs, farther, that I have been, and am ſtill, at a loſs to find any appearance of conſiſtency in an author who publiſhed a Commentary on the epiſtles of St. PAUL, and a treatiſe of the reaſonableneſs of chriſtianity, which he endeavours to prove by fact and by argument, after having ſtated as clearly, as he had done, the conditions and the meaſures of hiſtorical probability, and after having written as ſtrongly, as he had done, againſt the abuſe of words. I think that neither BACON nor LOCKE have

have kept up entirely to their own rules. But I think theſe rules are eſtabliſhed by them more truly than by any others.

THAT they are not ſo, in one very conſiderable inſtance, by DES CARTES, I have obſerved already; and ſhall not ſeek for any other in that reſpectable author. But the charge I have brought againſt the logic above mentioned is ſo very heavy, and this fault, among others, runs ſo evidently through the whole book, that I think it neceſſary to produce ſome examples of it. To produce them will be ſufficient: I ſhall make few or no reflections on them. Turn, if you pleaſe, to the fourth chapter of the firſt part, and to the fourteenth of the ſecond, which treat of the ideas of things, and the ideas of ſigns, and of the propoſitions wherein the names of things are given to their ſigns. You will ſoon ſee how far this writer was from meaning any improvement to human reaſon, by all the trifling matter he puts gravely and dogmatically together.

THAT we have ideas which are made ſometimes to ſtand as ſigns of other ideas is true; and ſo we have ideas which are made to ſtand in the relations of cauſe and effect to other ideas: but the ideas of both theſe kinds may be conſidered unrelatively; and they become ideas of ſigns, or cauſes, or effects, by an occaſional act of the mind, which joins them ſometimes properly, and ſometimes improperly, in theſe relations to

others. The idea of reſpiration, like that of ſpontaneous motion, is one of thoſe that compoſe our complex idea of every animal. It is a part of the idea, not a ſign of the whole. It cannot be the ſign of any particular animal, becauſe it is common to all animals. It cannot be the ſign of animality, or the ſuppoſed abſtract idea of animal, becauſe we have no ſuch idea. It cannot be the ſign of that confuſed crowd of ideal animals, that the mind repreſents to itſelf whenever we endeavour to think of animals in general, any more than the ſign of any particular animal. They all imply it; and they may be ſaid to be ſo many ſigns of reſpiration, juſt as well as reſpiration to be a ſign of them.

But be this as it will, about which it is ſilly to beſtow many words, let us obſerve that this author, who pretends to teach men how to think, endeavours to impoſe on them very groſsly, as groſsly as if he had imagined that they could not think at all without his help. Having amuſed his readers with the hypotheſis of ideas of ſigns, made ſuch by nature in ſome caſes, and by inſtitution in others, that are ſometimes certain and ſometimes probable, all which is very proper to perplex the thoughts of young logicians; he ſlides in, as evident examples of what he advances, ſuch as have not even an apparent connection with it. He diſtinguiſhes moſt nicely between ſigns that are joined to things, and ſigns that are ſeparated from them. Symptoms, he ſays,

ſays, the ſigns of ſickneſs, are joined to ſickneſs. Let it be that they are ſo in nature, and in our ideas, however this matter might be otherwiſe explained: but then he adds, as if all theſe were things analogous, "thus the ark, the ſign of the "church, was joined to NOAH and his children, "who were the true church at that time: thus "our material temples, the ſigns of the faithful, "are often joined to the faithful: thus the dove, "the ſign or figure of the Holy Ghoſt, is joined "to the Holy Ghoſt: thus the waſhing of bap-"tiſm, the ſign or figure of ſpiritual regenera-"tion, is joined to this regeneration." In ſpeaking of ſigns that are ſeparated from things, he is not ſo profuſe of examples. He produces one only, but that as appoſitely as any of the others. It is taken from the ſacrifices of the moſaic inſtitution, which were, he ſays, ſo many ſigns of JESUS CHRIST offered up in ſacrifice.

I MIGHT conclude my extracts here: but ſince it is of uſe to ſhew how great reaſon there is to guard againſt the fraud, as well as madneſs, of philoſophy, it may be proper to mention a few more paſſages of the ſame abſurdity or ridiculous importance out of this famous book. We are told then farther, that "a thing may hide and "diſcover another thing at the ſame time. It "may be thing and ſign at the ſame time, and "may hide as thing, what it diſcovers as ſign. "Hot aſhes, as a thing, hide the fire; as a "ſign, diſcover it. The forms that angels bor-

" rowed, as things, hid them; as ſigns, diſco-
" vered them. The euchariſtical ſymbols, as
" things, hide the body of CHRIST; as ſigns,
" diſcover it." Again, we are taught that
" the nature of a ſign being to excite in the
" ſenſes the idea of the thing figured by the
" idea of the thing figuring, as long as this ef-
" fect ſubſiſts, that is, as long as this double
" idea is excited, the ſign ſubſiſts, even tho the
" thing be deſtroyed in it's own nature. Thus,
" it is of no moment whether the colors of the
" rainbow, which God has taken for a ſign that
" he will deſtroy mankind by a deluge no more,
" be real and true, provided that the ſame im-
" preſſion be always made on our ſenſes, and
" that they (can he mean our ſenſes?) make uſe
" of this impreſſion to conceive the promiſe of
" God. Juſt ſo, it is of no moment that the
" bread of the euchariſty ſubſiſt in its proper
" nature, provided that the image of bread,
" which ſerves us to conceive in what manner
" the body of CHRIST nouriſhes our ſouls, and
" how the faithful are united one with another,
" be excited conſtantly in our ſenſes." One may
now ſafely challenge the ableſt profeſſor in bed-
lam to crowd more nonſenſe into fewer words;
and yet it is faithfully extracted from a book
which is put into the hands of young men, as I
remember that it was into mine, in order to im-
prove their reaſon, by teaching them a right de-
termination of their ideas, and a right conduct
of their underſtanding.

To

To ſay the truth, tho experimental philoſophy has been vaſtly improved by the moderns, and tho a true conduct of the underſtanding may be ſaid juſtly enough to be a new diſcovery in general, yet the ſame reformers, who have rooted up a monſtrous crop of old errors, have left ſome of theſe, and have planted others. The firſt philoſophy particularly has been over-run with both: and learning has finiſhed the round, which ignorance began. In the darkneſs of ignorance, ſuperſtition prevailed; in the light of knowledge, overweaning curioſity, the offspring of ſelf-conceit, as ſelf-conceit is of pride. Both are natural to the human mind, and each of them developed itſelf into activity at different times, and in that ſtate of things that was proper to it: ſuperſtition firſt; for ignorant, unciviliſed people, who are fierce to their fellow-creatures, are timid and docile under every apprehenſion of ſuperior power. Of theſe diſpoſitions, in favorable conjunctures, the perſian ZERDUSHT, whoever he was, the indian FOE, and the arabian MAHOMET, knew how to profit: and the magi, the bonzes, and the doctors of Mecca, were not at liberty, if they were inclined, to frame their notions of the firſt philoſophy according to nature and truth. They were to think on the principles their maſters had laid. Theſe were to be aſſerted, not examined. Fact was to be bent, and common ſenſe perverted, into a conformity with them. Puerilities and vulgariſms were to be taken

taken for marks of a divine ſimplicity, and the ravings of enthuſiaſm for the myſterious language of inſpiration. If the caſe has not been quite ſo bad in the chriſtian world, yet I will undertake to ſhew you, in another of theſe eſſays, as I endeavoured to do in one of our converſations, that the ſuperſtition of ignorant ages, and the fantaſtical knowledge of thoſe that were more learned, have produced ſome as extravagant opinions in theology among Chriſtians, orthodox and heretics, as any we can reproach to the Mahometans, or even to the pagans; and that they work their effect even at this hour.

All errors, even thoſe of ignorance and ſuperſtition, are hard to remove when they have taken long hold of the minds of men, and eſpecially when they are woven into ſyſtems of religion. But there are ſome from which men are unwilling to depart, and of which they grow fond, for a reaſon that has been often touched. As men advance in knowledge, their ſelf-conceit and curioſity are apt to increaſe; and theſe are ſure to be flattered by every opinion that gives man high notions of his own importance. What contradictions and inconſiſtencies are not huddled together in the human mind? Superſtition is produced by a ſenſe of our weakneſs; philoſophical preſumption by an opinion of our ſtrength; and ſuperſtition and preſumption contribute alike to continue, to confirm, and propagate error.

A SYSTEM of philoſophy, which had not contained a ſyſtem of theology, as well as of politics, would have been held in no eſteem among the antients. Many ſuch were formed, but with theſe conſiderable differences between the two ſorts. Errors in rules of policy and law were eaſy to be corrected by experience, like errors in natural philoſophy. Nay the firſt were ſo the moſt, becauſe how little regard ſoever philoſophers might have to experience in either caſe, the truth would force itſelf upon them, or others; in one by the courſe of affairs; whereas it muſt be ſought, to be had in the other. But when it was ſought, it was obtained. Errors in theology and metaphyſics could not be thus corrected; neither eaſily, nor at all, among men who ſeemed tacitly agreed to admit and confine themſelves to no criterion in theſe ſciences, neither to the phaenomena of their own ſpirits in their doctrines about ſpiritual nature, nor to the works of God, and the conduct of his providence, in their ſpeculations about his attributes.

ANOTHER difference between ſyſtems of theology, and thoſe of politics and laws, has been, and always muſt be, this, that the latter may be various, nay contrary to one another, and yet be ſuch as right reaſon dictates; provided they do not ſtand in oppoſition to any of the laws of our nature. But in theological reaſonings, and thoſe which are called metaphyſical, the various opinions

opinions may be all falſe, or if they are not all ſo, one alone can be true. This conſideration ſhould have had two effects. It ſhould have rendered philoſophers and divines more cautious in framing opinions on ſuch ſubjects, and leſs poſitive in maintaining them from the beginning: and when they found a multitude of queſtions ariſe, which were indeterminable for want of a ſufficient criterion, they ſhould have ceaſed the purſuit of unattainable knowledge, and have confined themſelves to the improvement of that which God has judged ſufficient for us, and has given us the means of acquiring. The very contrary has happened to ſuch a degree of extravagance, as muſt ſeem delirious to every one who is not in the ſame delirium. Can he be leſs than mad who pretends to contemplate an intellectual world, which he aſſumes, in the dull mirror of his own mind; of which he knows little more than this, that it is both dull and narrow? Can he be leſs than mad, who perſeveres dogmatically in this pretenſion, whilſt he is obliged to own that he arrives with many helps, much pains, and by ſlow degrees, to a little imperfect knowledge of the viſible world which he inhabits, and concerning which he is therefore ſober and modeſt enough to reaſon hypothetically? In a word, can he be leſs than mad, who boaſts a revelation ſuperadded to reaſon, to ſupply the defects of it, and who ſuperadds reaſon to revelation, to ſupply the defects of this too, at the ſame time? This is madneſs, or there is no ſuch thing incident

dent to our nature: and into this kind of madneſs the greateſt genii have been the moſt apt to fall: a St. PAUL, profound in cabaliſtical learning; a St. AUSTIN, deep read in PLATO; a father MALBRANCHE, and a biſhop of Cloyne. Elevation of genius makes them giddy: and theſe men, like thoſe who are born in the purple, imagine they can do every thing they have a mind to do, becauſe they can do more than others. The miſtake has been fatal to both; to theſe heroes in philoſophy, as well as to the others. Tho all men are not placed on the ſame level, there is a level above which no man can riſe: and he, who compares the nature of his mind with the nature of things, will be ſure to find it.

I HAVE now thrown upon paper all that occurs to my preſent thoughts, or all that I have leiſure to digeſt and extend, of what has been thrown out in many converſations concerning the folly and preſumption of philoſophers, the riſe and progreſs of their boaſted ſcience, the propagation of error and ſuperſtition, and the partial attempts that have been made to reform the abuſes of human reaſon. It has amuſed me in writing, I wiſh it may amuſe you in reading, and be of inſtruction to us both. Regular treatiſes and complete ſyſtems you do not expect from me: nor ſhould you have them, if I had a much higher opinion of my own capacity than I have. My ſuperiors in knowledge and parts would do better perhaps, if even they were content

tent to write eſſays, that they might improve, correct, or reject, as I am always ready to do, on farther obſervation, reflection, and information. In the mean time, what has been now ſaid may be ſufficient, as I think, to eſtabliſh the general propoſition, that there would be more real knowledge, and more true wiſdom among mankind, if there was leſs learning, and leſs philoſophy.

POST-

POSTSCRIPT

TO THE

SECOND ESSAY.

HAVING obſerved, in the foregoing eſſay, how abſurdly and preſumptuouſly philoſophers reaſon upon a ſuppoſed analogy of the human with the divine mind, whilſt they ſcorn to look downwards, and to obſerve the real analogy that there is between the mind or ſoul of the whole animal kind, the human ſpecies included; it has come into my thoughts to add the reflections that follow as relative to the ſame ſubject.

You may ſee in TULLY *, that the Stoics, who obſerved the internal and external conſtitutions of men to be very differently affected, according to the different climates, concluded from thence, that there were creatures of more ſublime natures in purer air; and filled unknown ſpaces with theſe unknown inhabitants. I am

* De nat. deor. Lib. ii.

far

far from embracing this hypotheſis; but it ſeems to me that there is a probability ſufficient to force our aſſent to another, which has prevailed leſs, becauſe it is founded on a degree of aſtronomical knowledge that few perſons have now, or had antiently; whereas the former is a mere wild aſſumption of imagination. The hypotheſis I mean, is that which we find in the Coſmotheoros of Mr. HUYGENS, and from which FONTENELLE has borrowed the materials of his pretty book of the Plurality of worlds. Tho I give this hypotheſis ſo modern an original, becauſe it is beſt known and ſufficient for my purpoſe, I am not ignorant that it had been advanced before, and that ORPHEUS, as well as Mr. HUYGENS, peopled the planets. We have reaſon to think he did by thoſe verſes which PROCLUS has preſerved, and in which the thracian bard ſpeaks of houſes and cities in the moon. But how old or how new ſoever this hypotheſis may be, it aſſumes, you know, that the planets of our ſolar ſyſtem, and the ſame may be aſſumed of thoſe of a multitude of other ſolar ſyſtems, which the immenſity of the univerſe contains, are worlds that have an analogy with ours, and the habitations of animals that have an analogy with us. The analogy muſt be, no doubt, very remote, in ſuch a vaſt variety of poſitions, conſtitutions, and laws of nature: but ſtill there may be, and there are very probably, relations both phyſical and moral between all theſe numberleſs worlds and ſyſtems of worlds, as between various parts of

of one ſtupendous whole, and the habitations of ten thouſand times ten thouſand millions of intellectual corporeal beings, who live, like us, under the providence, general or particular, of the incomprehenſible Creator of all things.

SHALL we be ſo abſurd and ſo impertinent now as to imagine, that all theſe creatures of God, tho corporeal like men, are confined to the ſame degree of intelligence, or even to the ſame manner of knowing? or, rather than believe that they are in theſe, and perhaps in other reſpects, ſuperior to us, ſhall we aſſert that there are no ſuch beings, and deny that they exiſt, tho we diſcover ſome of their habitations? Philoſophers who lived before the invention of microſcopes, might have aſſerted juſt as well, that the "minima naturae," imperceptible by their minuteneſs, as theſe beings by their diſtance, did not exiſt. We cannot diſcern a gradation of beings in other planets by the help of teleſcopes, as we obſerve ſuch a gradation by the help of microſcopes in our own; but the gradation of ſenſe and intelligence in our own, from animal to animal, and of intelligence, principally, up to man, as well as the very abrupt manner, if I may ſay ſo, in which this evidently unfiniſhed intellectual ſyſtem ſtops at the human ſpecies, gives great reaſon to believe, that this gradation is continued upwards in other ſyſtems, as we perceive it to be continued downwards in ours. We may well ſuſpect that ours

is the loweſt, in this reſpect, of all mundane ſyſtems; ſince the rational is ſo nearly connected, as it is here, with the irrational: and there may be as much difference between ſome other creature of God, without having recourſe to angels and archangels, and man, as there is between a man and an oiſter.

We are not able to conceive any manner of knowing, which we have not: and yet certain it is, that there may be many ſuch. But even if we aſſume arbitrarily, that there is no other manner of knowing, as thoſe profane divines do who confine that of God himſelf to knowledge by ideas; yet will it be ſtill evident, that other creatures of God may enjoy the ſame faculties, that we have, in a more perfect manner. It is eaſy to conceive, for inſtance, that there may be animals whoſe ſenſes can penetrate the inmoſt conſtitutions of ſubſtances, and who, having ideas of their real eſſences, know the firſt general principles and cauſes, where we know nothing more than ſome particular effects. There may be minds wherein ideas and notions once received or framed, never fade nor vary. Such minds may diſcern, at one glance, and by immediate intuition, the agreement or repugnancy of all their ideas and notions. The ſolution of the moſt difficult problem may be to them as eaſy, as the compariſon which ſhews the equality of twice two to four is to us. In a word, there may be, and it implies no contradiction to

ſuppoſe

ſuppoſe that there are, creatures in other ſyſtems of animal being tempered with finer clay, caſt in nobler moulds, than the human, and animated by ſpirits more ſubtile and volatile than ours, whatever theirs or ours are. It were to be wiſhed that philoſophers, who are ſo intent on the leaſt probable hypotheſes, would contemplate this, and would compare the manifeſt imperfections of their own nature with the poſſible, nay probable, excellencies of other animal natures. They might avoid one extreme into which they are apt to fall, by looking down on inferior beings; and another, by looking up at ſuperior. This double view would teach them neither to undervalue human nature, as ſome have done; nor to over-rate it, which is the folly of more.

WHAT has been here ſaid concerning the intelligent inhabitants of other planets is purely hypothetical. It can paſs for nothing more. But I am ſure that it is much more conſiſtent, and more conceivable, than the other ſyſtem, which prevails in our days, as it did in thoſe of old, the ſyſtem of an intellectual world, a world of immaterial ideas and of ſpiritual natures. Neither is it liable to have ſuch abſurd notions and practices grafted upon it, as have been grafted on the other. The inconſiſtency of maintaining, like PYTHAGORAS, that the human ſoul is a portion of the deity, "particula divinae aurae," and at the ſame time, that there are other ſpiritual beings between God and man; or like St. AUS-

TIN, that there is no mind exiſtent between the human and the ſupreme mind, " nec ulla na-" tura interpoſita ;" and, at the ſame time, that there are intelligencies ſuperior to man, and inferior to God ; the inconſiſtency of theſe opinions, I ſay, is equal, and equally obvious. But, on the other hand, to deny that there is any affinity between the ſupreme and created intelligences is very conſiſtent with this aſſumption, that the chain of intelligence from man upwards, through many orders of created intellectual beings, is immeaſurably long ; tho the uppermoſt link of this chain is not ſuppoſed to be faſtened to the throne of infinite wiſdom, nor to be nearer to it than the lowermoſt. Again : ſince our planet is inhabited by corporeal intellectual beings, the hypotheſis that aſſumes the other planets to be ſo likewiſe, is much more conceivable than that of legions of angels, of demons and genii, and of pure and impure ſpirits, which pagan theology invented, and Jews and Chriſtians adopted. Whether we ſuppoſe theſe beings immaterial, according to the preſent mode of opinion ; or whether we ſuppoſe them, as the antients both heathens and Chriſtians did generally, to be fine material ſubſtances, like that whereof they made the human ſoul, or wherewith they thought proper to cloath it in it's ſeparate ſtate, and of which TULLY ſays in his Tuſculans, " tanta ejus te-" nuitas, ut fugiat aciem ;" whichever we ſuppoſe, this hypotheſis ſtands on no other foundation, philoſophically ſpeaking, than that of a mere

mere poſſible exiſtence of ſuch ſpirits as are admitted for divers theological uſes. The other hypotheſis is founded on what we know of actual exiſtence. We are led to it by a plain, direct, and unforced analogy. We know that there are habitations: and we aſſume that they are inhabited.

THE firſt might appear plauſible, as it did in thoſe ages when poets and philoſophers, as well as the vulgar, imagined that the Supreme Being, who ſpoke, to uſe a common expreſſion, and the univerſe was made, and every act of whoſe will is ſufficient to deſtroy it again, ſtood in need, like ſome earthly monarch, of miniſters to attend his throne, of meſſengers to convey, and of troops to execute, his orders: when they looked on the viſible world as on a great palace, whoſe floor was the earth, and whoſe cieling, or upper ſtory, was the ſky *; and when, in conſequence of ſuch fantaſtical notions, they ſuppoſed the upper ſtory, or heaven, to be the habitation of gods, and of other celeſtial perſons, as the lower ſtory, or earth, was that of men. But it is time that theſe wild imaginations ſhould have no longer any place in the firſt philoſophy. As far as revelation realiſes and ſanctifies them, they muſt be employed by the divine: and he has, in revelation, a ſufficient authority for employing them. The philoſopher, whoſe object is natural theology, has not the

* Cujus coelum laquear, et terra pavimentum.

ſame; becauſe the reality of ſuch exiſtences cannot be deduced from any knowledge he has of nature, and becauſe he cannot be juſtified in going beyond the bounds which this knowledge preſcribes. Faith and reaſon, revealed and natural knowledge, ought to be always diſtinguiſhed; leſt one ſhould be confined, and the other extended too much: and divines and philoſophers ſhould keep in their diſtinct provinces.

THUS they proceed, for the moſt part, in matters of natural philoſophy. The modern philoſophers, tho very good Chriſtians, communicate the wonderful diſcoveries that have been made in corporeal nature, and concerning the true ſyſtem of the univerſe, without any regard to their repugnancy to the moſaic hiſtory of the creation, and to almoſt all the notions of the ſacred penmen, which were plainly thoſe of an ignorant people and unphiloſophical ages. When ſuch of theſe philoſophers as are divines endeavour to reconcile to philoſophical truth theſe apparent contradictions to it, they do but ſhake the authority of the ſcriptures, and ſhew moſt evidently how neceſſary it is to keep theology and philoſophy each on it's proper bottom, and to avoid at leaſt, by comparing theſe different ſyſtems, to demonſtrate that they are irreconcileable. St. AUSTIN and others paid, as divines, no regard to coſmography, and flatly denied the antipodes. The inquiſitors at Rome denied that GALILEI ſaw what he ſaid he ſaw, and

and puniſhed him very conſequentially for ſaying that he ſaw it. Several divines follow the ſame method. They enter into coſmographical diſquiſitions no more than St. AUSTIN, nor into aſtronomical any more than the roman inquiſitors; but content themſelves to take the hiſtory of the creation according to the literal and obvious ſenſe, as they find it related in the book of Geneſis, and as they would take any other journal or hiſtorical relation. They who have done otherwiſe, and have found, upon trial, that this relation, thus underſtood, could not be reconciled to nature, reaſon, philoſophy, nor natural theology (for natural theology teaches us to think of God in a manner very oppoſite to the ideas which MOSES gives of the Supreme Being, and of his operations) have made uſe of two expedients little favorable to the moſaic hiſtory: for ſome have aſſumed it to be in this part wholly mythological; and others, unable to wreſt natural philoſophy into an agreement with it, have ſo wreſted the text into a ſeeming agreement with their philoſophical theories, as to make it plain that this text may be applied to any hypotheſis, with ſome ingenuity, a ſkill in languages, and a knowledge of antiquity.——But I ſtop here a digreſſion that might carry me inſenſibly a great way, and that was intended only to ſhew, that ſince men have not admitted, in favor of revelation, a ſyſtem of phyſics that is inconſiſtent with philoſophical truth, there is no reaſon for admitting, in favor of the ſame revelation, a

ſyſtem of pneumatics that is ſo too: whereas an hypotheſis that has ſome foundations of probability in natural philoſophy may be admitted, for this reaſon, by the philoſopher; and even by the divine for another reaſon, becauſe it is not inconſiſtent with revelation. If it be ſaid that the pneumatical ſyſtem, which eſtabliſhes ſo many orders of ſpiritual beings, is not inconſiſtent with any knowledge that we have of nature; that it is properly a ſyſtem, becauſe it is eſtabliſhed on revealed authority; and that if we conſider it in a philoſophical light alone, and merely as an hypotheſis, it is better founded than the other; ſince we may aſſume, that there is a world of ſpirits, from what we know of our own ſpirit, by a more direct and eaſy analogy than that by which we aſſume, that the planets are inhabited by corporeal intelligent animals: if this be ſaid, the anſwer is obvious and deciſive. That there are ſuch ſpiritual beings, as the authority of revelation is brought to prove, may not be inconſiſtent with ſome philoſophical truths, but is ſo with others. Let it be, that any knowledge we have of natural philoſophy does not contradict this ſyſtem: yet is it ſuſpicious to the firſt philoſophy, becauſe unneceſſary; and inconſiſtent with it, becauſe the reaſons for the generation, to ſpeak like the heathen, or the creation, to ſpeak like Jews and Chriſtians, of this unneceſſary world of ſpirits, the ſuppoſed manner of their exiſtence, and the uſes to which they are put, or ſuffered to put themſelves, with a

multitude of other circumſtances, ſtand in oppoſition to ſeveral truths of the firſt philoſophy, or natural theology, and have ſerved only to promote polytheiſm, ſuperſtition, and idolatry. Theſe dogmas then, for if they are revealed they ceaſe to be hypotheſes, muſt be ſolely maintained on the authority of the ſcriptures.

If the divine keeps on that ground, he cannot be defeated. He may own his inability to anſwer the objections, and to ſolve the difficulties oppoſed to him; or may refuſe more prudently ſtill to give any attention to philoſophical reaſonings, by urging, that a time will come, a time appointed of the Father, when every knot will be untied, and every ſeeming repugnancy of reaſon to revelation will be reconciled; and that he is contented, as the philoſopher ought to be, to wait for that time. The rabbi might defer his anſwer till Elias comes: the Chriſtian till the Meſſias comes in his glory, and till the conſummation of things. In the mean while, a ſort of truce ſhould take place between the divine and the philoſopher. The former ſhould forbear the vain attempt of bending reaſon to ſupport revelation in this caſe; which is often done in many others, and almoſt always with notable prejudice to the latter. The philoſopher ſhould forbear to invade the province of the divine, on this condition; and ſhould content himſelf to aſſert and promote natural theology, without oppoſing it to ſupernatural. Both of them

them might thus concur in receiving the hypotheſis of planetary worlds, which does not require to be contraſted with the other, nor ſhould have been ſo by me, if I had not thought it neceſſary to ſhew at the ſame time, that there are probably finite created intelligences vaſtly ſuperior to the human, and that there is however no ſuch gradation of intelligent beings, as raiſes the moſt elevated of them a jot nearer to the ſupreme intelligence than the loweſt. I oppoſe this theological ſyſtem, and I defend the philoſophical hypotheſis, the rather, becauſe by theſe means we may combat the pride and preſumption of metaphyſicians in two moſt flagrant inſtances, in the aſſumption of a gradation of the ſame intelligence and knowledge from man to God, as I have ſaid already, and in that by which man is made the final cauſe of the whole creation; for if the planets of our ſolar ſyſtem are worlds inhabited like ours, and if the fixed ſtars are other ſuns about which other planets revolve, the celeſtial phaenomena were no more made for us than we for them. That noble ſcene of the univerſe, which modern philoſophy has opened, gives ample room for all the planetary inhabitants, whom it leads, and even conſtrains us to ſuppoſe. Where the ſpirits of the other ſyſtem reſide was a queſtion eaſily anſwered, when ſuperſtition and hypotheſis made up the ſum of theology and philoſophy. But it is not ſo eaſy to be anſwered now. Are the good and pure ſpirits in heaven? But where is heaven? Is it beyond

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all the ſolar ſyſtems of the univerſe? Or is it, like the intermundia of EPICURUS, in expanſes between them? Are the evil and impure ſpirits in hell? But where is hell? Is it in the center of any one planet for every ſyſtem? Or is it in the center of every planet? Do others wander in air? or reſide latent in every element? Are they confined inviſibly, like thoſe that the Chineſe imagine, to certain countries and cities, to rivers and lakes, to woods and mountains? Or is it their employment to attend on particular men, the guardian angels of ſome, or the devils and the tempters of others; for temptation is aſcribed to the evil ſpirits ſtill, tho poſſeſſion is ſo no longer, I think, out of Spain and Portugal, and other countries where religious ignorance prevails as much as in them, if any ſuch there are?——Tantum——

ESSAY

ESSAY THE THIRD:

Containing ſome further REFLECTIONS

On the RISE and PROGRESS of

MONOTHEISM,

That firſt and great PRINCIPLE of

NATURAL THEOLOGY,

OR THE

FIRST PHILOSOPHY.

ESSAY

THE THIRD.

SECTION I.

I HAD finiſhed the laſt eſſay before I recollected that there was ſomething in Mr. LOCKE's Diſcourſe concerning the reaſonableneſs of chriſtianity, very repugnant to what I have advanced about the knowledge of the one true God, and to what I ſhall have occaſion to ſay, on another occaſion, about the ignorance of natural religion, under which it is ſuppoſed that mankind labored before the coming of CHRIST. I ſhall not anticipate the ſecond point, but ſhall beſtow ſome more reflections on the firſt, in order to judge, whilſt the ſubject is freſh in my mind, whether I ought to retract any thing that I have ſaid to you in converſation, or that has fallen from my pen upon the ſubject. If it appears, on examination, that my notions are not ſo well founded in fact and in reaſon, as thoſe of this great man, in the preſent caſe, I ſhall ſubmit with pleaſure to an authority, that I

reſpect extremely in all caſes; and if it appears that they are better founded than his, in both, one uſeful leſſon will be the reſult of this examination: we ſhall learn how unſafe it is to take for granted any thing, in matters eſpecially which concern, or which are thought to concern, religion, that we have not ourſelves examined; and how inexcuſable it is to do this in caſes wherein we may be able, with a little pains, to judge for ourſelves.

THE firſt article of natural theology, in which the heathen were deficient, according to Mr. LOCKE, was the knowledge of one God, maker of all things. He admits, at the ſame time, that the works of nature, in every part of them, ſufficiently evidenced a deity; and that, by the impreſſions of himſelf, God was eaſy to be found. Theſe aſſertions do not ſeem very conſiſtent: and therefore it is added that the world made ſo little uſe of their reaſon, that they ſaw him not "ſenſe and luſt blinded their "minds. But the rational and thinking part of "mankind, he confeſſes, found the one ſupreme, "inviſible God, when they ſought after him." If this be true now, as it is moſt certainly, the heathen world made as good uſe of their reaſon, for ought I can ſee, as the chriſtian world. In this, it is not the irrational and unthinking, but the rational and thinking, part of mankind who ſeek, and find the true God: and juſt ſo we are told that it was in the others. Beſides, if this be

be true, it follows, that this great and fundamental article of natural theology is diſcoverable by a due uſe of human reaſon; and Mr. Locke acknowledges accordingly, again, that God was found by the wiſe and virtuous: which is a limitation of no great ſignificancy to his purpoſe, ſince the vicious would have ſought him in no ſtate of mankind, nor the fooliſh have found him. But ſays this writer, the wiſe and virtuous had never authority enough to prevail on the multitude, and to perſuade the ſocieties of men, that there was but one God. If he had proved, as well as affirmed this, he would only have proved, what no man denies, that ſufficient means to reclaim men from polytheiſm and idolatry, and to eſtabliſh the belief of one God, appear to have been wanting in general, and to a great degree, as far as the memorials we have of antient nations can ſhew. He would not have proved, that the light of nature was inſufficient, nor that the religion of nature was defective in this reſpect. He would not have proved, what he had in view to eſtabliſh, that the belief and worſhip of one God was the national religion of the Iſraelites alone, and that it was their particular privilege, and advantage, to know the true God, and the true worſhip of him; whilſt all other nations, from the beginning, adored the hoſt of heaven, as Eusebius aſſertsvery confidently, tho he is far from proving it.

Eusebius took much pains, and uſed much

art, I might ſay artifice, to ſpread an opinion that this knowledge and all good theology were derived from the Jews, and from their ſcriptures; nay that the philology and philoſophy of the whole learned world were purloined from thence, and the heathen were plagiaries, who lighted their candles at the fire of the ſanctuary; as ſome modern EUSEBIUS or other, GALE, I think, expreſſes himſelf. JOSEPHUS had gone before EUSEBIUS in the ſame deſign; for thus far Jews and Chriſtians made their cauſe common: and he had begun to falſify chronology, that he might give his nation a ſurpriſing antiquity. EUSEBIUS did the ſame: and without taking the trouble of deſcending into particulars, many of which are acknowledged by learned and orthodox writers, I may ſay, that from that time to this, or to the time when by the revival of letters, and the invention of printing, the knowledge of antiquity was made more eaſy and common, much the ſame practice was continued with much the ſame ſucceſs. Antient memorials have been forged and altered for this particular purpoſe, mere aſſumptions have been delivered as facts, and nothing has been neglected to give not only antiquity, but illuſtration, to a nation that never had much of the latter out of their own writings, and thoſe of chriſtianity. As the hiſtory of the Jews was committed to the care of their ſcribes; ſo the propagation of every learned ſyſtem, that could tend to the confirmation of it by reconciling anachroniſms

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and by coloring improbabilities, has been the charge of a particular order of men among Chriſtians, who had the monopoly of learning for many ages, and who have had a great ſhare of it ſince. This has been impoſed on the bulk of mankind, prepared by their prejudices to acquieſce under the authority of great names, and frightened from examining by the enormous piles of greek, and latin, and eaſtern languages, in which ſuch authors ſeem to entrench themſelves.

NOTWITHSTANDING this, I will ſay, and, if I know any thing, I ſay it on knowledge, that theſe entrenchments are not tenable. They cannot be battered down always, perhaps, by the ſame arms by which they are defended: but ſure I am, they may be undermined; and he who ſearches their foundations will find that they are laid on ſand. JOSEPHUS and EUSEBIUS will be of great uſe to him againſt themſelves. Their writings are repertories of valuable fragments, and of ſuch as would be more ſo, if more credit could be given to the fidelity of thoſe who cite them. I have ſometimes thought, that we might apply properly enough to the jew, and the chriſtian, author, what LA BRUYERE ſays, in his Characters, of PERAULT, that he quoted ſo many paſſages from antient writers, whilſt he attempted to prove the ſuperiority of the moderns, that his works were read for the ſake of theſe paſſages.

THINKING in this manner, I could not fail to be ſurpriſed when I found ſuch aſſertions as are mentioned above, in a treatiſe writ by Mr. LOCKE. The common herd of writers copy one another in every point that makes for their common cauſe, about which alone, and not about truth, they ſeem to be concerned. They affirm over and over ſo poſitively, and ſo long, things deſtitute of proof, or evident falſities, that even the laſt grow into belief; according to the practice of the court of Rome, as father PAUL repreſents it, in her uſurpations. I ſhould not have eaſily ſuſpected Mr. LOCKE of ſuch a proceeding, nor of affirming dogmatically what he had not ſufficiently examined. But he has writ below himſelf in this inſtance, by going out of his way, and has aſſumed the ſpirit of thoſe who write on the ſame ſubject; much like Sir ISAAC NEWTON, who loſt himſelf in the vague probabilities of chronology, after having purſued with ſo much ſucceſs the certainty of mathematical demonſtration.

I MEDDLE not here with any thing that is ſaid concerning that clear knowledge of their duty, which was wanting to mankind, as Mr. LOCKE affirms very untruly, before the coming of CHRIST; nor with the theological part of this treatiſe. I confine myſelf to theſe propoſitions: That all the heathen were in a ſtate of darkneſs, and ignorance of the true God; and conſequently that the belief and worſhip of one

God

God was the national religion of the Iſraelites alone. Now here I obſerve a want of that preciſion, which this great man is ſo careful to keep in all his other writings. As he does not diſtinguiſh enough the want of a ſufficient knowledge of natural religion, and the want of ſufficient means to propagate it, which he rather confounds in all he ſays about them; ſo he uſes theſe two expreſſions, the true God, and one God, as if they were exactly ſynonymous; whereas they are not really ſo: and the explanation, and juſtification of the diſtinction, in the preſent diſpute, will ſet the matter on a very different foot. It is not unity alone that conſtitutes the complex idea, or notion of the true God. There is, there can be but one ſuch Being: and yet a monotheiſt may be as far from the knowledge of the true God, as the rankeſt and moſt ſuperſtitious polytheiſt. I have taken notice, in the precedent eſſay, how the belief of one God, and of many, was reconciled in the heathen theology ſeveral ways: and what I have touched tranſiently may be ſeen made out fully in the Intellectual ſyſtem. A polytheiſt, who believes one ſelf-exiſtent Being, the fountain of all exiſtence, by whoſe immediate or communicated energy all things were made, and are governed, and who looks on all thoſe other beings whom he calls gods, that is, beings ſuperior to man, not only as inferior to the Supreme, but as beings all of whom proceed from him in ſeveral ſubordinate ranks, and are appointed by

him to the various uſes and ſervices for which he deſigned them in the whole extent of the divine economy; ſuch a polytheiſt, I ſay, will approach nearly to true theiſm, by holding in this manner nothing that is abſolutely inconſiſtent with it: whilſt the monotheiſt, who believes that there is but one God, and aſcribes to this God, whom he ſhould conceive as an all-perfect Being, the very worſt of human imperfections, is moſt certainly ignorant of the true God, and as oppoſite to true theiſm as the atheiſt: nay he is more injuriouſly ſo. Mr. LOCKE would have done like himſelf, if he had made theſe reflections before he had joined in the common cry: and he might have thought, perhaps, in that caſe, that the coming of CHRIST was neceſſary to give the Jews true notions of God, as well as to convince the Gentiles of his unity.

INSTEAD of this, he takes the common opinion for granted, ſuppoſes what is in queſtion, and does not ſo much as attempt a proof. He ſays indeed, that "there was no part of mankind "——— that had a greater light of reaſon, or "that followed it farther in all ſorts of ſpecu-"lations, than the Athenians; and yet we find, "he adds, but one SOCRATES amongſt them "that oppoſed and laughed at their polythe-"iſm— and we ſee how they rewarded him "for it." He quotes in the ſame place the reproach that St. PAUL made to this people. "Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all

"things

" things ye are too ſuperſtitious: for as I paſſed " by, and beheld your devotions, I found an " altar with this inſcription, TO THE UNKNOWN " God." If theſe were meant for proofs of what he aſſerts, they were unluckily choſen. Matter of fact is miſtaken in one, and in neither of them is there the leaſt color of argument. SOCRATES was ſo far from oppoſing the religious worſhip eſtabliſhed at Athens, that he held it to be the duty of every citizen to follow the religion eſtabliſhed by the laws of his city, as we know upon good authority, that of XENOPHON: and if we turn to the Euthyphro in PLATO, we ſhall find him declaring, in his zeal for polytheiſm, againſt all the traditions which he judged to be unworthy of the gods, tho they were believed and reſpected by the vulgar. This was his crime. He neither oppoſed, nor laughed at polytheiſm, tho he certainly believed the unity of the Supreme Being. But the zeal of bigots in thoſe days, as in ours, made it no leſs criminal to reject the abuſes of religion, than to profeſs atheiſm: and a faction in the ſtate took advantage of this, to put him to death.

BUT if we ſuppoſe, for argument ſake, that he was put to death for oppoſing and laughing at polytheiſm, and idolatry; if the Athenians were ſuperſtitious, as they were undoubtedly, and if they dedicated an altar to the unknown God, what will all this ſerve to prove? It will prove only that men are apt, and even the moſt

judicious ſometimes, to erect their ſcanty knowledge of a few particulars into a ſuppoſed general and certain knowledge of any ſubject. A little tract of land paſſes with them for the whole world, two or three nations for all mankind, and two or three thouſand years for all antiquity. Are we able to compare the Athenians very exactly in this reſpect, or in any other, with the people who floriſhed at the ſame time, and of whom we have ſome accounts in hiſtory and tradition? How much leſs are we able to compare them with ſo many other nations, of whom not ſo much as the names are come down to us, or were known to them? What argument then can be drawn from the polytheiſm, idolatry, and ſuperſtition of this little ſtate, to that of the whole world, which is the point to be proved? or from the Athenians in the days of SOCRATES, or St. PAUL, even to the Athenians themſelves in the ages whereof the prieſts of Sais talked to SOLON; nay to the whole race of mankind in theſe, and ſtill more antient ages? for even theſe were not deemed the firſt.

I MIGHT leave the argument here, ſince the author of the Reaſonableneſs of chriſtianity offers no other proofs of the facts he advances. But I think myſelf obliged to juſtify my opinion, ſo contrary to his, and to that of the whole crowd of ſcholars, on whoſe authority he reſts. Great men take great liberties, and expect to be believed on their words: and the diſciples of Mr.

Mr. LOCKE have as good a right, as the diſciples of any philoſopher, to uſe the αὐτὸς ἔφη. But for me, who cannot allow it to any in matters which I am able to examine, and who ſhould think myſelf obliged to give my reaſons even for agreeing with him in all ſuch matters, it ſeems ſtill more incumbent upon me to give thoſe which induce me to differ from him: and I ſhall do ſo without repeating much of what has been ſaid by me already.

I HAVE ſaid in the former eſſay, and I have given my reaſons for it, that I do not believe mankind diſcerned the unity of God in the firſt dawnings of knowledge. But the impreſſions of the Creator are ſo ſtrongly marked in the whole extent of the creation, and the idea of an all-wiſe and all-powerful Being, firſt cauſe of all things, is ſo proportionable to human reaſon, that it muſt have been received into the minds of men as ſoon as they began to contemplate the face of nature, and to exerciſe their reaſon in ſuch contemplations; and this was long before the commencement of any traditions that we find out of the books of MOSES. Profane memorials ſhew us the whole world (and ſacred memorials except the patriarchs and the Iſraelites alone out of this dark ſcene) involved in polytheiſm, ſuperſtition, and idolatry. But ſtill, both ſacred and profane concur in ſhewing us ſome gleams of light that break through theſe clouds, ſome notices of the knowledge and worſhip

worſhip of the true God, that were kept up among the ſons of men. They appear faintly, and very imperfect they were in theſe times, perhaps, early to us, tho late with reſpect to the beginning of our mundane and human ſyſtem. But ſtill they appear, and give us ſufficient reaſon to collect from their appearances much more than they ſhew us immediately.

It is ſtrange to obſerve how unwilling eccleſiaſtical writers and divines are to admit this truth: and it is often provoking to obſerve that they, who have no more pretence to be believed about their own religion, than the heathen writers about theirs, preſume to contradict what the latter of theſe affirm about their faith, in oppoſition to the invectives of chriſtian writers, tho they appeal to the antient doctors of paganiſm, whom they do not appear to have interpolated, and under whoſe names there is no pretence to ſay that they have impoſed any ſpurious books on the world: both which accuſations are evidently true of our chriſtian writers in the firſt, and, as we commonly ſay, the pureſt, ages of chriſtianity. It is ſtranger ſtill to obſerve how little regard the ſame perſons pay, upon this head, even to the opinions of the greateſt ſaints, and moſt learned men of their own church. I could quote many inſtances. Let one ſuffice. It ſhall be taken from St. Austin, who, anſwering a paſſage of Faustus the manichean, wherein he makes the belief of one Supreme Being the common

badge of pagans, Jews, and Chriſtians, does not allow indeed that the Chriſtians took the opinion of a divine monarchy from the heathens; but is forced to allow that theſe were not ſo given up to falſe gods, as to loſe the belief of the one true God, from whom every kind of nature proceeds *.

THE polytheiſm, ſuperſtition, and idolatry of Egypt appear ſo monſtrous in the light in which we view them, that they furniſh the principal topics of every declamation againſt the theology of paganiſm: and yet I perſuade myſelf that the knowledge and worſhip of GOD in his unity had prevailed even there in times unknown to us. Let it be conſidered that the Greeks, through whom all our profane anecdotes concerning this country have been conveyed, were not much acquainted with it, nor had reſorted to it in ſearch of knowledge till the reign of PSAMMITICHUS, that is, till ſeventeen or eighteen centuries after the eſtabliſhment of this monarchy, dating this eſtabliſhment only from MENES, and bringing him down as low as he is dragged by MARSHAM. THALES, SOLON, and PYTHAGORAS went thither nearly about the ſame time, in the reign of CROESUS at ſooneſt; or in that of CAMBYSES at lateſt. By this chronology it appears, that an

*—— Gentes non uſque adeo ad falſos deos eſſe dilapſas, ut opinionem amitterent unius veri Dei, ex quo eſt omnis qualiſcunque natura. Lib. xx.

immenſe

immenſe ſpace of time, ſufficient for many revolutions in religion and government, was elapſed before the Greeks had the means of being well informed about either: and the antiquities of Egypt might be as obſcurely and imperfectly ſeen by theſe firſt philoſophers, who went thither, as the greek antiquities are by us. We may puſh this conſideration farther: and ſuppoſe that the ſame polytheiſm, ſuperſtition, and idolatry that they found eſtabliſhed in Egypt, were eſtabliſhed there in the time of ORPHEUS, ſix or ſeven hundred years before, or even in the time of CECROPS, CADMUS, DANAÜS, or ERECTHEUS, who are ſaid to have carried colonies, letters, and civil inſtitutions into Greece two or three hundred years ſooner than ORPHEUS carried religious rites and myſteries thither: and there will remain ſtill, behind all theſe events, an antiquity more than ſufficient for one revolution in theological opinions, and in religious worſhip at leaſt, and perhaps for more than one.

I AM willing to grant more than EUSEBIUS, or any one elſe, has proved: and yet this conceſſion will only thruſt the æra of egyptian polytheiſm and idolatry back into a greater antiquity. It will not give any grounds to aſſert, like EUSEBIUS, that the Egyptians were polytheiſts, and idolaters, or profeſſed a ſort of religious atheiſm from the beginning; nor that the Iſraelites alone knew and worſhipped the true God. It may lead us, perhaps, to opinions very oppoſite to theſe, and much

much better founded on profane, for I ſhall not yet conſider the ſacred authority that is alledged for them, and that is more ſo in appearance than in reality. The more antient the eſtabliſhment of polytheiſm and idolatry in Egypt is agreed to have been, the ſtronger the argument grows, that may be drawn from thoſe notices, that we have in our moſt authentic accounts of egyptian theology, of a purer faith and worſhip. The belief of one ſupreme, inviſible, and incomprehenſible Being, the creator of all things, muſt have been once firmly ſettled in the minds of that people, when ſo many ages of prevalent polytheiſm and idolatry were not able to root it out, nor to efface the traces of the worſhip of him. Public profeſſion, and practice, the outward ſyſtem of religion, was altered, and the purity of it corrupted many ways, and by different motives. But nothing except conviction could have preſerved, from time immemorial, in the ſecret theology or inward doctrine of the Egyptians, this fundamental article of all true religion, the exiſtence of one Supreme Being, creator, and monarch of the univerſe: and this article was ſo preſerved. Whatever errors the Egyptians, or their ſcholars the Greeks, admitted into their theology, this opinion tinctured every theiſtical ſyſtem: and even they who held the world to be eternal, like ARISTOTLE and others, held the world, and the deified parts of it, to be ſo, not as ſelf-exiſtent, but as eternal effects of an eternal cauſe. ARISTOTLE argues in his metaphyſics againſt the folly of ſuppoſing

poſing more principles than one: and nothing can be more expreſs than the doctrine of PLOTINUS on this point, where he diſtinguiſhes between priority in the order of time, and priority in the order of nature; and makes the world coeval with God no otherwiſe, than as light is conceived to be coeval with the ſun.

THE belief of one Supreme Being may appear the more evidently to have been that of the Egyptians, publicly profeſſed in the moſt antient times of that monarchy, and held at all times in their ſecret theology, from this conſideration, that it was brought from thence by the firſt of the Greeks, who went thither for inſtruction, and that the ſame doctrine was held by the laſt of thoſe who had ſtudied this philoſophy. THALES and PYTHAGORAS, to ſay nothing of PLATO here, who came long after, brought it into Greece, diſguiſed indeed under hieroglyphical and myſtical repreſentations, but yet too plainly taught to be miſtaken for the contrary doctrine. ANAXAGORAS made a more public uſe of it by his writings, and has gone away with the honor of being the firſt of the Greeks who introduced a nous, or mind, into the coſmopoeia. THALES was of the ſame opinion as ANAXAGORAS: and EUSEBIUS quotes very unfairly what this philoſopher ſaid of water, as of the firſt principle of all things, without making any mention of that intelligence who framed all things of water according to THALES *.

* Cic. De nat. deor. l. i.

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This notion of a fluid chaos, which we know to have been very general, by PLUTARCH and by other authorities, was very moſaical too, and points up to an egyptian original. The founder of the ionic ſect had it from thence moſt certainly; and MOSES too, if we give any credit to SIMPLICIUS, who ſcrupled not to declare, as I find him quoted by Dr. CUDWORTH, that the paſſages in the firſt of Geneſis about the creation of the world were taken from egyptian traditions. He called them fabulous, becauſe he was a zealous aſſerter of the eternity of the world. But his authority will not make them paſs for ſuch. MOSES, who had been inſtructed in all the wiſdom of the Egyptians, might believe them true upon much better grounds. Nay more, he might be directed, if you pleaſe, by inſpiration to take from them his belief of the beginning of things. Upon the whole, it is plain that the Supreme Being, the maker of the world, was acknowledged by the egyptian theology at the firſt period that has been mentioned.

To prove that the ſame doctrine was derived from the ſame ſource, by the laſt of thoſe who applied themſelves to the ſtudy of egyptian theology, I ſhall content my ſelf to bring JAMBLICHUS forward; a very myſterious writer indeed, and yet plain enough to eſtabliſh what we contend for. He anſwers the queſtions PORPHYRY had aſked of ANEBO, under the name of ABAMMON the maſter of ANEBO. He was a Syrian, a very learned man, and much more capable, probably, than

than any Egyptian of that age, to give a body of their divinity. Now we learn by the eighth ſection of the book he wrote on this occaſion, that the egyptian philoſophy ſuppoſed a multitude of eſſences, as they expreſſed themſelves, and a multitude of different principles of theſe eſſences, from whence I am apt to think, that PYTHAGORAS borrowed his numbers, and PLATO his ideas. They carried their inquiries beyond all the bounds of human knowledge, and they diſputed, as we do now, about words. But ſtill it is manifeſt, that theſe eſſences, or principles, were deemed ſubordinate to the firſt cauſe; for before them all, and before their firſt god and king the ſun, they acknowledged a Being, the fountain of all being, the root of all intelligible ideas. From this Being proceeded, according to this theology, "ex-"plicuit ſe" in GALE's tranſlation, that Being who is his own father, ſufficient to himſelf, the God of gods, the father of eſſences, from whom all exiſtence flows. This was the doctrine which MERCURIUS TRISMEGISTUS taught; and theſe were the principles he placed before the aetherial, empyreal, and celeſtial deities, concerning whom he wrote a great number of volumes. That this is a rhapſody of nonſenſe, I agree moſt readily. But it may not be leſs genuine for that, and it is ſufficient for my purpoſe; ſince it eſtabliſhes the unity of God even more preciſely, and leſs myſteriouſly, than the athanaſian creed.

THAT greek metaphyſical refinements helped to

to render the egyptian theology leſs intelligible, I ſhall not controvert; tho he muſt paſs for a dogmatical pedant, who preſumes to affirm that they did ſo, and pretends to be a competent judge of the matter. But ſure I am, that the orthodoxy of it, in this great point, is better proved by this quotation from JAMBLICHUS, than the ſuppoſed monſtrous heterodoxy of it by any authority EUSEBIUS brings to juſtify his charge. He affirms very poſitively, in the third book of his Evangelical preparation, that no other gods, beſides the ſtars, were acknowledged even in the hidden theology of the Egyptians; that the creation of the univerſe was aſcribed to the viſible ſun alone; and all things depended, according to it, on fatal neceſſity, and on the influence of the ſtars, without the intervention of any incorporeal being, any efficient reaſon, God, gods, or inviſible intelligent natures. To maintain this ſtout aſſertion he quotes a fragment of PORPHYRY's letter to ANEBO, and triumphs much in it, tho it makes nothing to his purpoſe. It proves that CHAEREMON and ſome other writers had induced PORPHYRY to doubt concerning this article of the egyptian creed, and that he writ to his prieſt to be informed of the truth. CHAEREMON was an Egyptian, and had been a prieſt, as ANEBO was: for neither the comic poet, nor any other of that name, can be the perſon intended, as it ſeems to me. PORPHYRY might poſſibly know nothing more of him: his authority, therefore, appeared ſuffi-

cient to make PORPHYRY inquire; but it was not ſufficient to make EUSEBIUS affirm, in flat contradiction to ſo many better authorities, and even to his own in other places. This CHAEREMON, I believe, was he who had accompanied AELIUS GALLUS in his voyage from Alexandria higher up into Egypt, and had been derided for his ignorance and arrogance by the whole company. STRABO had been one of this company; and EUSEBIUS had read the ſeventeenth book of his Geography, without doubt, wherein an account is given of this important perſon. It is ſhameful, therefore, to ſee him quoted for the true notions of egyptian theology. There were ſome philoſophers and learned men in Egypt, very probably, in the time of CHAEREMON. But the colleges of thoſe antient philoſophers, under whom EUDOXUS and PLATO had ſtudied, were deſert; or if they remained, they were become ſeminaries of prieſts, who took care of ſacrifices, performed the other rites of ſuperſtition, exerciſed all the craft of their order, and took no pains to improve themſelves and others in knowledge. EUSEBIUS ſhould have remembered that, if CHAEREMON's authority was good againſt the Egyptians, it was of ſome force and weight againſt the Jews; which he would have been as unwilling to admit as JOSEPHUS, who accuſed CHAEREMON for this reaſon of impoſture, unleſs he had avowed in this caſe a maxim, which he and JOSEPHUS have done little elſe than avow in others, that the ſame teſtimony is good when it

makes for them, and bad when it makes againſt them. EUSEBIUS ſhould have remembered, when he derided the comment of PORPHYRY on the verſes attributed to ORPHEUS, and when he aſked how the author, whoever he was, could ſing of God, or mean that efficient mind that created the univerſe, who had never heard of any ſuch doctrine; he ſhould have remembered, I ſay, that he begged the queſtion, and ſuppoſed what he had not proved againſt the pagans.

IT has been obſerved already, that the unity of a Supreme Being muſt have been once a firſt principle of egyptian religion, ſince it pierced through ſuch an immenſe ſeries of polytheiſm, ſuperſtition, and idolatry. Here we may obſerve to the ſame purpoſe, that all the metaphyſical and theological refinements of Egypt and Greece were not able to remove this angular ſtone of true theiſm. When metaphyſics and theology are made ſciences, and theſe ſciences become the profeſſions of orders of men, who increaſe their conſideration in the world, or advance their temporal intereſts, by creating an appearance of myſtery where there is none, or by increaſing it where it is, the ſimplicity of religion will be loſt of courſe, and natural theology will be transformed into artificial. We may find examples to confirm this truth in the chriſtian ſyſtem: and I much doubt whether the evangeliſts would underſtand the epiſtles of St. PAUL, tho one of them was his ſcribe, or St. PAUL the works of St. AUSTIN,

tho the ſaint took ſo much of his theology from the apoſtle. This happened in the egyptian ſyſtem of religion; but this fundamental article, the unity of God, was preſerved, tho darkened and perplexed by the engraftments made upon it. Such were thoſe which may be found in PLATO, and in the latter Platonicians; ſuch were thoſe which I have, and others which I might have cited from JAMBLICHUS. But in all of them the exiſtence of a Supreme Being, the Being of beings, the God of gods, the fountain of all exiſtence, the root of all intelligible ideas, was acknowledged.

MAY one not think, without being too hypothetical, that we ſee, in the anecdote PLUTARCH * relates concerning the belief and worſhip of the people of the theban dynaſty, the laſt ſtage of orthodox faith, and of natural religion in Egypt? They adored the "one God eternal, inviſible, not "like to any viſible objects, nor to be repreſented "by them." I uſe Mr. LOCKE's words, for if he had intended to deſcribe this faith and worſhip from PLUTARCH, he could not have done it more exactly; and yet this is the deſcription of that God who was not known, according to him, till the light of the goſpel manifeſted him to the world. He might have aſſerted juſt as truly, that no men but the Jews knew how to read and write before the coming of Chriſt; becauſe ma-

* De ISIDE et OSIRIDE.

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ny of them knew it ill, as they do to this day, and ſome of them did not know it at all.

At what time the true God was thus publicly known and worſhiped in the upper Egypt, it is impoſſible to determine. But we ſee in the hiſtory aſcribed to Moses, that he was known in the lower Egypt, and the neighbouring country of the Chanaanites, in the days of Abraham. The adventures of this patriarch and his ſon, when their wives were taken from them, are told in ſeveral chapters of Geneſis a little confuſedly; but however they ſerve to eſtabliſh this fact. No man, who reads the twentieth chapter of Geneſis, can doubt, whether it was the true God, or not, of whom the author meant to ſpeak, and who appeared to the firſt of the Abimelechs in his ſleep. It has been ſaid, I know, on this occaſion, that God manifeſted himſelf ſometimes to thoſe who were not in his alliance, or covenant, but that he did this always for the ſake of his own people. He did it then, at this time, to preſerve Sarah's chaſtity. Be it ſo. But ſtill he manifeſted himſelf on this important occaſion. The king of Gerar knows him, and appeals to his juſtice. God is pleaſed to declare that the king's intentions were not criminal, and that he had therefore kept him from the commiſſion of the ſin: a very unneceſſary reſtraint, ſurely, ſince the king did not intend to commit it, ſince his intentions were not criminal. God commands, the king obeys, Abraham intercedes,

cedes, and ABIMELECH is reſtored to the power of begetting, and his wife and his concubines to the power of conceiving, children. The ſame, or which is more likely, ſome other ABIMELECH had taken warning, and therefore as ſoon as he knew that REBECCA was the wife of ISAAC, he threatened death to any man who ſhould preſume to lie with her, and bring ſo great a ſin on him and his people. He followed ISAAC to Berſabea, and there this king, his miniſter, and his general deſired to make a ſolemn league with him, becauſe they knew that the Lord was with him *. The reaſon they gave to induce him to conſent, was not only that they had done no hurt to him, nor his, but that they had ſent him from Gerar with the bleſſing of the Lord †. Is the true God pointed more directly out any where in the ſame book? Do not the ABIMELECHS acknowledge him, and conduct themſelves, on this occaſion, as one of the patriarchs might have done?

MELCHISEDECH muſt not be forgot in this place. A thouſand idle gueſſes have been made, and various fables invented, about him. St. PAUL, in his epiſtle to the Hebrews, ſhews great cabaliſtical ſkill on this ſubject; and grounds on ſuch forced alluſions, as might paſs in the ſchool of GAMALIEL, the leaſt concluſive reaſoning that was ever heard out of it. The book of Geneſis ſays little of this king and prieſt, but enough to ſhew

* Tecum eſſe Dominum.

† Dimiſimus auctum benedictione Domini. Gen. cap. xxvi.

that

that the true God was known to others beſides the jewiſh line of patriarchs, and before the Iſraelites were a people. He was of egyptian race, as ſome have aſſerted without any grounds, I believe, of hiſtory or tradition, but not without an air, at leaſt, of probability. In all caſes he was prieſt of the moſt high God as well as king of Salem. As ſuch he bleſſed ABRAHAM; as ſuch the father of the faithful received his bleſſing; as ſuch he paid him the tithes of his plunder, which is a title, by the way, for carrying the divine right of tithes farther than the moderation of the church has hitherto carried it *. Since he was a prieſt of the true God, as well as king of Salem, or Jeruſalem, are we to believe that his ſubjects were all idolaters? The ſuppoſition cannot be reconciled to common ſenſe: and, ſince it cannot, ſure I am that the propoſitions I combat cannot be ſo, nay I have the authority of the bible on my ſide. I ſhall have it ſo again before I have done.

IF I would proceed now, as learned men preſume to do very frequently, and without the leaſt ſcruple, I might venture to affirm, on theſe foundations a little extended and improved, not only that the true God was known by the Egyptians and by ſome of the people of Paleſtine before the vocation of ABRAHAM, but that this patriarch, who became the father of the faithful,

* What is here ſaid, is ſaid on the authority of St. PAUL; for, if we believe MOSES, it may be that MELCHISEDECH paid tithes to ABRAHAM.

tho ſaid to have been bred an idolater, learned this orthodox faith in Egypt, and the neighbouring countries, if he was ſo bred in his own. But I am not ſcholar enough to preſume to affirm on wild conjecture. I dare go no farther than ſufficient probability leads me, and ſufficient vouchers ſupport me. With theſe on my ſide, I might go on to ſhew, that the unity of a Supreme God was taught both by the Chaldeans, and the magi; and might reſt on the proofs brought by CUDWORTH in his Intellectual ſyſtem, by HIDE in his Treatiſe concerning the religion of the antient Perſians, and by other authors, leaving critics, who are not able to ſubvert the ſyſtems of theſe writers, to nibble at ſome particular circumſtances. But I chooſe to leap at once to the extremity of the eaſt, and to ſhew by anecdotes leſs common, that a nation, lately known, had, in as great, or even a greater, antiquity, the ſame faith.

THE nation I mean is the Chineſe, who will not be ſuſpected, one would think, of having had any communication with the Iſraelites, tho I would not anſwer for ſuch antiquaries as HUETIUS, nor others of that ſtamp. The Chineſe have their pentateuch as well as the Jews, and one volume of it is as old as FOHI the founder of their empire. Two other volumes contain records as old at leaſt as the deluge, and the two laſt are collections from other antient monuments publiſhed by CONFUCIUS, who lived ſix hundred years before CHRIST, and was therefore elder than

than ESDRAS. The chineſe ſcholars, as proud of the antiquity of their nation as ever any of thoſe who diſputed formerly about theirs could be, might diſregard our moſt antient traditions, and look on MOSES as a modern hiſtorian. They might found their incredulity on their credulity, and their poſitiveneſs on their ignorance; which is the general caſe of bigots in the weſt, as well as in the eaſt. But for us, who have the happineſs to live in this enlightened age, and who pretend to examine every thing, and to judge according to evidence, we ſhould have no good grace to reject the claſſical books of the Chineſe. They come to us upon as good original authority as that of the Jews, they contain as few things that are repugnant to the general obſervation and experience of mankind as any other antient records, and much fewer than ſome; and they have been preſerved in a manner that gives them a ſingular authenticity, into which I will not enter, becauſe it would lead me far, and might cauſe ſome invidious compariſons *.

THIS authenticity is ſo well eſtabliſhed, that the atheiſts in China are forced to ſubmit to it; and tho their advantage would be to reject theſe books, they endeavour by all the artifice of ſophiſtry to drag a meaning out of them, which may ſeem to ſet the opinion of antiquity on their ſide. The antient ſages among the Chineſe, like thoſe of other nations, delivered their doc-

* Vid. Scien. ſin. etc.

trines in ſhort apophthegms, in parables and allegories. They who followed were not ſo laconic: but even they dealed much in figure; and, allegory allegoriſing allegory very often by way of explanation, the ſenſe, which was at firſt obſcure, grew to be worſe than obſcure, it grew to be litigious. The paraphraſes and commentaries multiplied, the diſputes increaſed, and the labor on every ſide has been to confirm different and oppoſite opinions, by different expoſitions of the ſame text. The language, as well as genius, of this people has helped to increaſe the confuſion, not ſo much indeed as if theſe books had paſſed through ſeveral languages; but ſtill a great deal from the ſcarcity of words and the neceſſity of ſupplying this defect, when they ſpeak by numberleſs inflections and tones of voice, and when they write by numberleſs points and accents.

A JESUIT, who reſtored the miſſion in the laſt century, after it had been ſome time interrupted by the authority of the government, took a method which it is to the preſent purpoſe to mention. He engaged in the diſpute that was carried on between the theiſts and the atheiſts; and maintained, in concert with the former, that the antient Chineſe believed and worſhiped one God. This God, the God of their fathers, denied by ſome, forgot by more, and almoſt unknown, he declared to be the God whoſe revelation, and whoſe will, he came to publiſh among

among them. Neither he, nor thoſe who followed him have made many real converts to chriſtianity, nor perſuaded that people to believe that his religion was in former times eſtabliſhed amongſt them, tho many pious frauds have been employed for that purpoſe. But in the other part there has been leſs difficulty, and more ſucceſs; for the ſtate of the diſpute ſeems to have ſtood thus.

A BEING called XAM TI, which words ſignify the Supreme King, appears in all their antient books to have been worſhiped as the diſpenſer of temporal good and evil to mankind. FOHI offered victims, and HOAM TI built a temple, to this divinity. From this time, that is, from an aera anterior to any of ours, the ſame worſhip continued, together with religious rites practiſed in honor of inferior ſpirits *, who are ſometimes called the miniſters of the Supreme King, and who are ſaid by one of the interpreters of CONFUCIUS to exerciſe their offices "in hoc coeli et terrae medio," to bring bleſſings on the good, and puniſhments on the wicked. The book Xu Kim ſays expreſsly, that their great emperor and legiſlator XUN ſacrificed to XAM TI, and to the ſix principal ſpirits. Another claſſical book mentions a very antient edict, by which all the people are commanded to pay honor to the Supreme Emperor of heaven, and likewiſe to the ſpirits, that the

* Vide CONFUC.

ſpirits

ſpirits may intercede for the happineſs of the people, " ut pro populo flagitarent felicitatem." Such paſſages, and a multitude of others to the like effect, are found in antient books of the Chineſe, as we learn from the Jeſuits, from whom alone we can have any tolerable information; and it ſhould ſeem that ſuch authorities were ſufficient to decide the controverſy, and to leave no doubt whether the antient people of this country believed a God, or were atheiſts. But the men of letters among them at this time profeſs a ſort of ſpinoziſm, to which they endeavour to reconcile theſe paſſages, and there are many examples in the Scientia ſinica of the extravagant paraphraſes they make for this purpoſe.

The atheiſts inſiſt, and the theiſts admit, that the word Tien, which ſignifies heaven, is frequently uſed now, and was ſo antiently, as ſynonymous to the words Xam Ti. What the atheiſts would infer from thence is obvious, but by no means concluſive. Their forefathers imagined, as I believe that all the antient people of the world did, and as almoſt all the people of the world do ſtill, that the habitation of God, and all celeſtial beings, was above that canopy which appeared to be ſpread over their heads, and which they called heaven. From hence the cuſtom aroſe of employing the word which ſignifies the place of reſidence, for the word that denotes the being who is ſuppoſed to reſide in it. But the argument, that reſults from the pro-

promiſcuous uſe of theſe words, will turn, according to my apprehenſion, directly againſt the uſe which the atheiſt would make of it. If the antient Chineſe had acknowledged no higher principle than matter and form, no ſupreme intelligent Being, the words Xam Ti, far from being uſed as ſynonymous to the word Tien, would never have come into uſe at all. A man who ſhould ſay at Pekin, China declared war againſt the Tartars, or the emperor of China did ſo, would ſpeak as intelligibly as a man at London would do, who ſhould ſay Great Britain, or the king of Great Britain, declared war againſt France. But the ſame manner of ſpeaking cannot obtain in a country that has neither emperor, nor king; and no Dutchman ever ſaid indifferently this Holland did, or this the king of Holland did. This argument muſt be the ſtronger in the mouths of chineſe theiſts, becauſe in the ſame books, wherein the words we have mentioned are thus uſed, the ſeparate exiſtence of the ſpirits of mountains, rivers, and cities, and of the ſeaſons, the ſun, the moon, and the planets, is taught: and yet theſe ſeparate ſpirits, and the things over which they preſide, are ſpoken of with the ſame licence. They are called indifferently the ſpirit of the mountain, or of the river, and the mountain, or the river; nay the very ſame words, that are employed to ſignify the fortifications of a city, are employed to ſignify the tutelary ſpirits of that city. On the whole, we may conclude that a Supreme Being was known

to the antient Chineſe, tho ſuperſtition, idolatry, and atheiſm have been ſo prevalent among that people ſince. The ſacrifices performed with ſo much order and pomp, ſo much reverence and religious awe, the faſts, the purifications, and the other acts of divine worſhip which were practiſed, were not performed and practiſed ſurely in honor of matter and form, nor directed to theſe vague ideas of the human mind. The empreſſes who nouriſhed ſilk-worms, and weaved ornaments for the altars; the emperors who ploughed and ſowed annually, and raiſed by the ſweat of their brows the fruits of the earth, which they offered on thoſe altars, acknowledged without doubt ſome other divinity than TAI KIE, and LI. Thus we muſt think, unleſs we can be as abſurd as EUSEBIUS, and figure to our ſelves a ſort of religious atheiſts, who acknowledging no deity beſides dead and ſenſeleſs matter, yet worſhiped it, invoked it, and implored it's aſſiſtance. But this ſottiſhneſs and contradictious nonſenſe CUDWORTH cannot believe incident to human nature *, and I preſume to think that moſt men will be of the ſame mind.

SECTION II.

THE particular proofs that have been brought, or to which I have referred, in this and the foregoing eſſay, are ſufficient to deſtroy the credit of the aſſertions to which they

* Intell. ſyſtem.

are

are oppoſed. But it may be proper to ſhew farther, that if there were no ſuch particular proofs of the acknowledgment of the one true God by other nations beſides the Iſraelites, yet the aſſumption, that he was acknowledged by them alone, and that all other nations were polytheiſts and idolaters from the beginning, would deſerve to be rejected for it's abſurdity; ſince it will be found inconſiſtent with the tenor of the moſaical hiſtory, when we take ſcripture for our guide, and with all the rules of judgment that obſervation, experience, and good ſenſe ſuggeſt to us, when we conſider the human character and the courſe of human affairs. I am not ſurpriſed when I meet in BOCHART with ſuch an aſſertion as this boldly advanced, that "there was "no church before the deluge except in the "family of SETH;" and that after the deluge, "till the coming of CHRIST, God made him-"ſelf known to no people except to thoſe who "were of the race of SEM *." But when I meet with ſuch aſſertions as I have quoted from Mr. LOCKE, in an author who lays aſide the comments and ſyſtems of divines, and betakes himſelf to the ſole reading of the ſcriptures, I confeſs myſelf ſurpriſed to the laſt degree at the weakneſs of the ſtrongeſt minds.

WE have nothing to do here with the antediluvian world. We leave the eccleſiaſtical hiſtory of it to BOCHART, and the natural to

* Geog. Sac. lib. i. c. 1.

BURNET.

BURNET. But if we conſult the bible for what paſſed after the deluge, and is to our preſent purpoſe, we ſhall find that the knowledge of the one true God, derived to NOAH from ADAM by uninterrupted ſucceſſion, and confirmed to him by many particular revelations, muſt have been common to him, and to his family, as much as thoſe particular precepts which he is ſaid to have received from the mouth of God, and which are called praecepta noachidarum. The ſons of NOAH, therefore, when they diſperſed themſelves to re-people the world, muſt have carried this knowledge with them, and have communicated it to their deſcendants, in all the ſettlements they made, and in all the colonies that were propagated from theſe.

THIS is ſo evident that it would ſuffer no diſpute in any ſimilar caſe: and yet, for reaſons not hard to find, nor proper to avow, it is denied in this. LACTANTIUS ſays *, that HAM the ſon of NOAH ſettled in Arabia; and that, not having received the worſhip of God by tradition from his father, the nation he founded was the firſt that knew not God. A ſtrange aſſertion indeed, and ſuch an one as cannot be true, if the ſacred hiſtory be ſo. We read there †, that the patriarch lying drunk and naked in his tent, and this ungracious ſon ſeeing him in that indecent condition, he told it to his brothers; that SEM and JAPHET went reverently backwards, ſaw not

* De orig. Er. c. 4. † Gen. ix.

their

their father's nudity †, and threw a cloak over him. After this, NOAH pronounced the prophetical curſe againſt CHANAAN, the ſon of HAM, who was to be the ſervant of the ſervants of his brothers ‖: and this prophecy, it is ſaid by BOCHART and others, had it's completion when the Chanaanites were ſubdued by the Iſraelites. But whatever criticiſms good or bad may be made on it, and whatever reflections the puniſhment of CHANAAN, who had no ſhare in his father's crime, may ſuggeſt, this gave the Iſraelites the ſole title they had to the land of promiſe by the grant God made of it to the poſterity of ABRAHAM, and was employed to juſtify all the cruelties they exerciſed on the Chanaanites.

THIS unfortunate perſon was not only puniſhed in his race, as the prophecy threatened, but his name and memory are cruelly perſecuted to this day by the unrelenting wrath of jewiſh and chriſtian writers. Some have accuſed him of gelding his father, and ſome of committing inceſt with his mother. He was baniſhed, they ſay, to the ſcorching climate of Africa, and the color of his poſterity is a laſting monument of the blackneſs of his crimes. He not only preſerved and propagated the necromancy which he had learned of the laſcivious angels before the deluge *, but he became himſelf an object of ido-

† Patris virilia non viderunt.

‖ Servus ſervorum erit fratribus ſuis.

* BOCHART. Geog. ſac. lib. iv. c. 1.

latry, as he had been an idolater, and was worſhiped under the name of JUPITER HAMMON. They who can believe all this, may believe that polytheiſm and idolatry were eſtabliſhed immediately after the deluge. But they, who are not quite ſo credulous, will ſee that ſuch opinions are irreconcileable to the ſcriptures, and to common ſenſe. NOAH might be as angry as he pleaſed with his reprobate ſon, and might conceal from him as many traditions as he could; yet ſtill this ſon had been an eye-witneſs of the deluge, he had been ſaved with the reſt of the family in the ark, he had aſſiſted his father without doubt in building it, and in making all the other preparations for that great cataſtrophe, as well as for the renewal of the ſpecies of animals, and the reſtoration of things afterwards. Is it poſſible to conceive that he ſhould not have heard, whilſt they floated together over the drowned world, who that God was by whoſe power it was drowned, and what thoſe crimes were which had drawn this aſtoniſhing deſtruction on mankind? It is impoſſible. His father could not conceal this knowledge from him. HAM knew the one true God moſt certainly, and had often joined in the worſhip of him. He could no more be ignorant of God, than he could be of the deluge.

THIS is ſo very plain, that it cannot be directly, nor generally, denied, whatever expreſſions may be ſometimes uſed by men whom learning

ing emboldens, and zeal is apt to tranſport. But then the chronology, founded on the genealogies in the book of Geneſis, ſuppoſes the tradition of theſe revelations, by which God communicated himſelf to man, to have been preſerved ſo little a time after the deluge, that it gives a color to ſuppoſe all the nations of the world, nay even the deſcendants of SEM, ignorant of the one true God: and on this aſſumption, preſumptuous dogmatical perſons, who affect to be in the whole ſecret of the divine economy, eſtabliſh the reaſon that they aſſign by another aſſumption for the election and ſeparation of the poſterity of ABRAHAM from all other people. Infinite wiſdom, it ſeems, could contrive no other expedient for continuing the primitive faith and worſhip, for ſuch that of the one true God was by theſe accounts, among the deſcendants of one family that had repeopled the earth, except this of reviving them, and continuing them by ſuch a ſeries of revelations and miracles among one people, as would have made any revival of them unneceſſary among any other; becauſe they would have been more than ſufficient to continue them uncorrupted over the whole world, not only till the vocation of ABRAHAM four hundred years after the deluge, not only till the coming of the Meſſiah two thouſand years after that, but even to this hour, and to the conſummation of all things.

SOME place the aera of idolatry preciſely at SE-

RUG, who was three generations older than ABRAHAM. Sir JOHN MARSHAM thinks it a very proper date *. A probable one I am ſure it is not; nor indeed a proper one for any purpoſe, except that of making mankind idolaters juſt in time for introducing the vocation of ABRAHAM. This might render it proper for EUSEBIUS, EPIPHANIUS, and all the tribe of Jews and Chriſtians, who have employed every literary artifice to confine the knowledge and worſhip of God to the choſen ſeed, and to repreſent them as the ſole object of providential care for twenty centuries. But I think that the learned and judicious chronicler has not deſerved to be ranked among this partial and colluſive tribe. We might call them the blind tribe too, ſince they muſt not have ſeen (unleſs you ſuppoſe that they ſaw, but depended on the blindneſs of a then ignorant world) that this knowledge and worſhip could not have been as confined as they ſuppoſe it from the time of the flood, unleſs God had by one continued miracle concealed himſelf to eſtabliſh the kingdom of the devil, and altered the very nature of things to make ſo important, ſo univerſal, ſo indiſputable a tradition die before it's time, and, as we may ſay, at once.

WHEN the ſame perſons attempt to eſtabliſh the credibility of the moſaical hiſtory, they do not inſiſt alone upon the divine inſpiration of the author,

* Can. chron. ſac. 4.

but

but upon the ordinary means that he had of knowing, with the greateſt certainty, all that we find related in the pentateuch. Theſe means were the traditions which they ſuppoſe to have come freſh and authentic to him through a very ſmall number of generations, tho from a very great antiquity. ADAM lived nine hundred and thirty years; and the deluge happened ſixteen centuries and an half after the creation. NOAH therefore, who was born ſix hundred years before the deluge, had lived with thoſe who had lived with the firſt of men. NOAH continued alive three hundred and fifty years after the deluge, that is, within ſeventy ſix years of the vocation of ABRAHAM; and SEM the ſon of NOAH died juſt as many years after this vocation. From ABRAHAM the traditions paſſed to ISAAC, and from him to JACOB; and all the perſons who had converſed with this patriarch could not be dead in the courſe of a century, which intervenes between the deceaſe of JACOB and the birth of MOSES. Thus you ſee that the traditions from ADAM, to this legiſlator and hiſtorian, paſſed through about ſeven generations, and from NOAH to ABRAHAM, and his cotemporaries, through one or two at moſt, according to this chronology.

LET us take now this chronology for good, whatever objections may be made to it, or how precarious ſoever the principles of it deſerve to be eſteemed. But then let us aſk every man of

ſenſe and candor who receives it, whether he can perſuade himſelf that in the days of ABRAHAM, about four hundred years after the deluge, nay much ſooner, in the days of SERUG, the exiſtence of that God who had deſtroyed and reſtored the world, in ſo aſtoniſhing a manner juſt before, could be wholly loſt in the memory of mankind? I ſay juſt before, with very good reaſon; becauſe the diſtance of three or four centuries, when the lives of men were reckoned by centuries, may be called properly "juſt before." The deluge was an event as modern to ABRAHAM and the men of that age, as the reſtoration of king CHARLES the ſecond is to us of this age. Could the belief and worſhip of God be loſt by the deſcendants of SEM, an hundred years before the death of SEM? Could they be loſt even during the life of NOAH? Is it poſſible to figure to ourſelves the children of theſe holy patriarchs profeſſing polytheiſm, and practiſing idolatry, under the eyes of their fathers; and ABRAHAM, for inſtance, educated in the religion of the zabians, a new name given by our learned men to the Chaldeans, after mahometan writers, whilſt SEM was ſtill alive? Once more: Is it credible in the loweſt degree of credibility, that the Chaldeans, who were able to give CALLISTHENES, two thouſand years after the flood, aſtronomical obſervations of as great a number of years at leaſt, ſhould know nothing of the flood, of the occaſion, of the author of it, in a word, of the true God, in leſs than four centuries after

after it had happened? Theſe improbabilities are ſo very monſtrous, that it is marvelous any men ſhould be hardy enough to impoſe them, or ſilly enough to believe them. When MAIMONIDES is gravely quoted to prove TERAH an idolater, I let my book fall with aſtoniſhment. As ſoon would I quote NAVARETTE, a ſpaniſh miſſionary, to prove that the firſt coin, of which we have any knowledge, is that made by TERAH the father of ABRAHAM, at the requeſt of king NINUS, and for thirty pieces of which JUDAS ſold his maſter.

I KNOW that JOSHUA is introduced in the twenty fourth chapter of the book aſcribed to him, ſpeaking in the name of God to the children of Iſrael, and telling them that TERAH, the father of ABRAHAM and NACHOR, had ſerved ſtrange gods. Now that here and there a man might begin to corrupt the worſhip of the true God, even in theſe early days, is juſt credible. But that the true God ſhould be unknown, and idolatry eſtabliſhed, at that time, is what I affirm to be incredible. Let commentators puzzle over the text, or take the fact as they find it without any examination, it will become other men to believe that ſomething has happened to the jewiſh records, like that which happened to thoſe of another antient people, the Phenicians; and that if the ſcribes of the former have not corrupted their hiſtory, as PHILO BYBLIUS, who publiſhed a greek tranſlation of SANCHONIA-

THON in the reign of ADRIAN, complains that the prieſts of the latter had corrupted theirs; we may ſuppoſe at leaſt, as ſome even of the jewiſh doctors have done, that the genealogies of the bible, far from being complete, are imperfect abſtracts; or that they have been compiled, as father FOUQUET, at his return from China, where he had reſided three and twenty years, aſſured me that the chronological table in the Scientia ſinica had been. This table is compoſed of cycles of threeſcore years each, and all theſe cycles appear to us unbroken. But the learned Jeſuit averred, that in the originals many of them wanted the beginning, and many of them the end. So that the ſpace of time to which this table refers could not be ſhorter, but might be immeaſurably longer, than the chronological table his brethren had put together repreſents it. In a word, it will become reaſonable men to aſſume any hypotheſis rather, than to believe, againſt univerſal experience, the leaſt diſputable analogy, and the plaineſt dictates of common ſenſe, that the knowledge and worſhip of God were entirely forgot, whilſt the preachers of both, and the eye-witneſſes of the deluge, were ſtill alive.

LET us believe, on the authority of MOSES, that God, truſting neither to the impreſſions of himſelf that are viſible on the whole face of nature, nor to the reaſon he gave to man, communicated this knowledge, and directed this worſhip,

worſhip, by immediate revelations. But let us not be ſo abſurd as to believe, on any authority, that ſo many ſignal revelations, and aſtoniſhing miracles, atteſted by evidence unqueſtionable, and delivered down by immediate, not remote, tradition, could be forgot ſo ſoon; nor that they could be remembered, and the great truths they communicated and confirmed, be forgot. All theſe muſt have continued ſtrongly impreſſed on the minds of men much longer, even in the ordinary courſe of things. They muſt have continued to be ſo not only in the countries where the repeopling of the world began, but wherever the founders of nations led their colonies from thence: which they began to do in the days of PHALEG, that is, about a century after the flood. If we believe, on the authority of MOSES, that God made himſelf known by revelations and miracles to all the men that were at a certain time in the world, and from whom all the nations of the world deſcended; we cannot believe, on the ſame authority, becauſe we cannot believe conſiſtently with it, that his being and his worſhip were unknown to any of theſe, or forgot by any of them in the courſe of a very few years. The ſame authority would be made thus to contradict itſelf. In the caſe of another hiſtory we ſhould ſay that neither might be true. But in the caſe of this we may ſay that both cannot. The firſt is a plain, independent fact, that muſt be reputed true on the whole, whatever diſputes may ariſe about circumſtances,

or

or the hiſtory muſt be reputed fabulous. But the other depends on a chronology very liable to miſtakes, and not affecting the truth of the former. That famous aſtronomer, CASSINI, took the pains to calculate backwards a remarkable eclipſe or two, that are mentioned in the antient chineſe annals. He found that ſuch eclipſes had been, but the dates were not exact. Juſt ſo we find that the one true God was eclipſed, if I may uſe this expreſſion; but tho the eclipſe laſted long, and laſts to this hour in ſome parts of the world, it could not begin ſo early, nor ſpread ſo univerſally, as ſome men would induce us to believe. Will it be ſaid that the confuſion of languages, which began at once in the plains of Sennaar, and was followed by the diſperſion of mankind into all the parts of the earth, as the ſtory is generally, tho erroneouſly, underſtood, interrupted or corrupted tradition, and gave occaſion to the immediate eſtabliſhment of polytheiſm and idolatry? But the argument to be drawn from this famous event will prove the very contrary. Tho languages were confounded, memory was not deſtroyed; and the knowledge which had been common to all men whilſt they lived together, and formed but one community, was continued, and delivered down in different languages, after this diviſion. The knowledge was diſperſed, as thoſe who had it were diſperſed; and the ſame truths were taught then, as they are now, in different tongues. Nay farther, this very confuſion, and the diſperſion of mankind,

mankind, which were brought about in ſo miraculous a manner, and by an immediate act of the ſame omnipotent Being who had ſo lately deſtroyed, and now reſtored, the world, would have become, if this had been the caſe, the ſtrongeſt confirmations imaginable of the truths that were known before; and with the renewal and confirmation of theſe truths in their minds, the ſons of men would have ſettled themſelves in ſeveral countries, and have given beginnings to the ſeveral nations. Among theſe, therefore, and in oppoſition to truths ſo well known, and ſo ſignally confirmed, it was not poſſible that the zabians, and the magians, and every other ſect of idolaters, ſhould ariſe, till by a long tract of time, and a multitude of revolutions in the affairs of mankind, true primitive traditions, and genuine theiſm, began to decay together. Then, and not till then, might prieſtcraft prevail, which Mr. Locke eſteems an obſtacle to the progreſs of true religion, and which I believe, on principles founded in the moſaical hiſtory, to have been the great corrupter of it after it had been eſtabliſhed. I might eaſily illuſtrate and confirm theſe opinions, which are both true relatively to different times, and different places, by examples drawn from hiſtory, and even from the experience of our own age; from what paſſes in countries where the propagation of chriſtianity is attempted by miſſions, and in thoſe where this religion is already eſtabliſhed.

Some-

SOMETHING ſtronger than this may be objected to me. It may be ſaid, that whilſt I argue on probable reaſons, and endeavour to ſhew that the true God, and the true worſhip of him, could not be forgot, nor polytheiſm and idolatry be eſtabliſhed, as ſoon as they are ſaid to have been, among the nations of the world; I do not enough conſider what paſſed among God's choſen people, in inſtances where no ſuppoſition of anachroniſm will help me to evade the force of ſcripture authority. Some pert divine may bid me deſcend a little lower in the hiſtory of the bible, and learn there how ſhort the duration was, even among this people, of thoſe impreſſions which revelations and miracles ſhould have rendered permanent, and almoſt indelible, according to me, even among the other people of the world, who were left to walk in their own ways. I do ſo again, as I have done already often, and I find that the poſterity of ABRAHAM, or the children of ISRAEL, as they were called, after that ſome myſterious perſon or other had changed the name of JACOB, who worſted him at wreſtling, into that of ISRAEL; I ſay, I find that they were become idolaters before their deliverance out of Egypt, confirmed, hardened idolaters, and ſo accuſtomed to the manners, and wedded to the ſuperſtitions, of the Egyptians, that however MOSES drew them forth as a ſeparate people, there ſeemed to be, as EUSEBIUS *

* Praep. evan. lib. vii. c. 8.

himſelf

himſelf confeſſes it happened he knew not how, no perceivable difference between them and the Egyptians. This may well appear the more ſurpriſing, if it be true, according to the common reckoning, that JACOB died leſs than two centuries before the exode, that JOSEPH died about fifty years after his father, and that LEVI had not been dead ſo long when AARON was born, and MOSES after him. How this could happen, neither EUSEBIUS was able to account, nor is any man elſe. Dr. SPENCER † takes pains to prove the fact: and it is ſomething odd to ſee the authority of EUSEBIUS and THEODORET, of MAIMONIDES, and R. JUDA ſuperfluouſly employed to confirm what the bible had proved in ſeveral places to his hand. But when he goes about to reconcile the fact to ſome notion of reaſonable probability, he ſucceeds ſtill worſe, and does as much too little, as he had done more than enough. The learned writer thinks that, if this people had been treated in a better manner by the Egyptians, they could however have hardly avoided taking up the barbarous manners of that nation to which they had been ſo long accuſtomed. But he argues, à fortiori, that this was inevitable, becauſe they endured a cruel ſervitude in Egypt, and becauſe ſuch a ſervitude renders men little attentive to religious matters, and diſpoſes them to conform to the manners and genius of their

† De leg. Heb. rit. lib. i. c. 1.

maſters *. Now the very reverſe of this maxim, and this reaſoning, ſeems to me to be true. The fear of ſtripes may produce, whilſt it continues, ſuch a conformity in outward ſhew, but it can diſpoſe men inwardly to embrace the manners and opinions, religious, or others, of their tyrants, no more than it can diſpoſe them to love their perſons: and even the appearance of ſuch a conformity will ceaſe whenever the ſlaviſh eſtate ceaſes. It will not only ceaſe, but the ſlaves become freemen will throw off every badge of their ſlavery, and prefer the manners and opinions of thoſe eſpecially by whom they are delivered, to ſuch as they profeſſed through fear, when they were under the laſh of their taſkmaſters, "pugnis "fuſtibuſque ſaevientes. †" Tyranny may make hypocrites, it can never make proſelytes. Whoever has ſtudied the human nature, and been careful to obſerve the courſe of human affairs, muſt think it repugnant to both, not only that the Iſraelites ſhould forget the traditions of their fathers, and the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, in ſo ſhort a time, but that they ſhould have been as much wedded to idolatry, as the Egyptians themſelves were.

But if this be ſtrange, it is ſtranger ſtill to obſerve how little effect revelations of public no-

* Tam ſervilis autem, et infelix vivendi conditio, hominum animos anguſtos reddere ſolet, rerum coeleſtium cura vacuos, et in dominorum ſuorum mores et ingenia pronos. Spencer ubi ſupra. † Ibid.

toriety,

toriety, occaſional, and conſtant or ſtanding, miracles before the exode, at the exode, in the wilderneſs, in the promiſed land, under their judges, and under their kings, had on the ſame people. They forgot the true God, even whilſt he conducted them viſibly through the deſert. They revolted from him whilſt the peals of thunder, that proclaimed his deſcent on the mountain, rattled in their ears, and whilſt he dictated his laws to them. All the power that omnipotence could exert was not ſufficient to revive in the minds of this ſtubborn generation, the faith and piety of their fathers, nor a due and laſting ſenſe of that religion which they had certainly followed, for ſome time at leaſt, after their ſettlement in Egypt *: and Dr. SPENCER therefore might have termed their manners barbarous with much more reaſon than he applied that epithet to thoſe of the Egyptians. As the means of conviction, and the motives of ſubmiſſion to the religion that MOSES inſtituted, continued, and increaſed, ſo did the indocility, and apparent incredulity, of this elect people. Neither the promiſes nor the threatenings, the rewards nor the puniſhments, by which God endeavoured to attach them to himſelf; neither his condeſcenſion in wearing their crown, and in governing them like an earthly monarch till they depoſed him, nor his con-

* Iſraelitas, ſub prima incolatus aegyptiaci tempora, ſcientiae divinae lampadam a patribus acceptam habuiſſe, e religionem avitam integram et illibatam diu tenuiſſe, nobis facilè perſuadeamus. Ibid.

ſtant

ſtant reſidence, even after his depoſition, among them, could ſucceed. They were proof againſt miracles to ſuch a degree, that there would not have been more room for ſurpriſe, if we had been told, that NOAH and his family ſerved ſtrange gods even in the ark, than there is to find, in the hiſtory of this people, that they revolted back to idolatry nine hundred years together on every occaſion. This hiſtory, in ſhort, contains many particular miracles which operated effectually againſt the ordinary courſe of nature, phyſical and moral: and at the ſame time the whole thread of it is a ſyſtem of miracles ineffectually operated for a purpoſe ſo natural, that every one of them ſeems to make the next unneceſſary.

IF the divine now ſhould aſk me, after all that I have owned in favor of his argument, whether that, which happened at and after the exode, might not happen after the deluge? whether the families that repeopled the earth at this period might not forget the true God, and his worſhip, immediately after it, notwithſtanding any traditions, as we ſee that God's choſen and favorite people did during their bondage in Egypt; and as they continued to do very frequently from that time till the babylonian captivity, notwithſtanding the miraculous advertiſements, and the interpoſitions of providence ever watchful to prevent theſe apoſtaſies? if the divine, I ſay, ſhould aſk me ſuch queſtions, my anſwer would be this: The hiſtory of the bible tells me, that theſe things paſſed

paſſed as I have repreſented them. But I know that they are repugnant to univerſal experience, and I have a conſcious certainty that they are ſo to the human nature. Look into the hiſtory of the world, reverend ſir, and you will find too many examples of pretended revelations, of forged miracles, and of groundleſs traditions, that have prevailed among mankind from age to age, to leave it in your power to think that unexceptionable revelations, real miracles, and certain traditions, could be ever ineffectual. Nothing leſs than the greateſt of all miracles could make them ſo: and who ſhould work ſuch a miracle? Not God moſt certainly; for thoſe which were diſappointed of their effect, you ſay, were wrought by him. Was it then the devil? But how came he to have ſuch a power, and to be ſuffered to exert it in ſuch a caſe? I know farther, moſt intuitively, that no creature of the ſame nature as I am of, and I preſume the Iſraelites were human creatures, could reſiſt the evidence of ſuch revelations, ſuch miracles, and ſuch traditions as are recorded in the bible. Look into yourſelf, reverend ſir, and you will find it to be ſo. God appearing in all the terrors of his majeſty, and his prophets denouncing judgments which were inſtantly, and literally fulfilled, to mention theſe particulars alone out of many, muſt have rouſed the moſt ſtupid, have terrified the moſt audacious, and have convinced the moſt incredulous.

Such an anſwer as this might procure me in return ſome eccleſiaſtical billingſgate. I might be called infidel, deiſt, and perhaps atheiſt. I ſhould be accuſed certainly of diſbelieving the holy ſcriptures. My reply to ſo angry a diſputant would be calm, and ſuch as might teach charity to thoſe who preach it ſo much, and practiſe it ſo little. "Ne ſaevi, magne ſacerdos." I do not ſo much deny the truth of the facts related, as I oppoſe the application, and the uſe made of them. You argue from the conduct of the Iſraelites to that of other nations; and would perſuade us, that all theſe might be polytheiſts and idolaters from the beginning, becauſe the true God and his worſhip were forgot ſo ſoon, and ſo often by his choſen people. But I deny that any ſuch analogy will hold good. The Iſraelites were a people ſet apart from the reſt of mankind, and indeed ſo ſet apart, and ſo diſtinguiſhed, that the proceedings of God towards them, and their behaviour towards God, and towards man, make all together ſuch a ſeries of hiſtory as can be compared with no other; ſuch an hiſtory as ſhews us this people, but leads us to judge by analogy of no other. In profane hiſtory we acquire experience of mankind, and of human affairs. The benefit we reap from it conſiſts in this, and by this general knowledge we judge of every particular hiſtory that we read. In ſacred hiſtory we acquire none of this experience. It is the hiſtory of a people not only ſet apart from the great community of mankind, but in many

reſpects taken out, as it were, of the human ſyſtem. To make the events recorded in it ſerve as foundations, therefore, of the judgments we paſs on thoſe that may have happened among other people, is juſt as abſurd as it would be to make a collection of miracles, that is, of events out of the ordinary courſe of nature, and even repugnant to it, ſerve as the foundation of natural and experimental philoſophy.

LET us believe then what is in the bible, becauſe it is there: not, like TERTULLIAN, becauſe it is impoſſible, or abſurd; but altho it be improbable, or inconſiſtent. At the ſame time let us not apply the extraordinary events that we find there to ſuch as happen in the ordinary courſe of human affairs. Much leſs let us apply our own obſervation and experience, by which we judge very properly of other hiſtories, to that of the bible. That of the bible muſt ſtand on the bottom of it's own authority, independently of all other: and I am perſuaded that nothing has ſhaken this authority more, than the ſilly attempts of ſome writers to confirm it by arguments drawn from the reaſon of things, that is, from a compariſon of ideas derived from human obſervation and experience. It ſeems to me, that divines ſhould reſt the authority both of the Old and New teſtament on the proofs they are able to bring of their divine original, and of the uncorrupt manner in which they have been conveyed down to latter ages, ſolely.

To eſtabliſh the credit of other hiſtories, for I conſider the bible here only as an hiſtory, it is not indeed ſufficient to aſcertain the authors of them; becauſe theſe authors, being men, may have been deceived, or may have deſigned to deceive. For this reaſon their internal, as well as external, proofs of authenticity are examined; and they are received, or rejected, as they appear conſiſtent or inconſiſtent, conformable or repugnant, to the obſervation and experience of mankind. But this ſecond examination is unneceſſary when the queſtion is about the word of God, known to be ſuch by evidence ſuperior to all contradiction, or it is impertinent and profane. If we could ſuppoſe the authenticity and divine original of the ſcriptures deſtitute of ſufficient external proof, this deficiency would not be ſupplied by all the ſkill of thoſe who pretend to diſcover, by their ſuperior penetration, the internal proofs. If the authenticity and divine original of them be, on the contrary, ſufficiently eſtabliſhed by external proof, it is both impertinent and profane to pretend to confirm divine teſtimony by ſhewing that there is reaſon to believe it true. Reaſon has been too much employed where it has nothing to do, and too much neglected where it has moſt to do. Men have believed implicitely, when they ſhould have reaſoned, in laying the grounds of faith; and they have reaſoned dogmatically, when they ſhould have believed implicitely, theſe grounds being once laid.

A MAXIM has been eſtabliſhed in theology, which may be brought to juſtify this proceeding againſt me; and the authority of St. AUSTIN may be brought to juſtify the maxim. But the authority of common ſenſe, much better than that of St. AUSTIN, will juſtify me in ſaying that the maxim is falſe. The maxim is this, that miracles themſelves are not to be admitted as proofs of a divine original, unleſs the cauſe, for which they are wrought, appears to us to be good; and therefore not till the doctrines they atteſt have been examined. By a parity of reaſon it may be ſaid, that altho the external evidence, which proves the ſcriptures of divine original, be full in that reſpect, yet the internal evidence muſt be ſought for in them to make their authenticity complete in every reſpect. This maxim, and this way of reaſoning were taken up perhaps very properly at a time when reports of miracles were eaſily believed, when every ſuppoſed magician was thought to perform them, and when they, who would not allow the pretenſions of APOLLONIUS TYANAEUS, for inſtance (who was oppoſed by the pagans to CHRIST, and who was worſhiped as a god with CHRIST, ABRAHAM, and ORPHEUS, by the emperor SEVERUS) were obliged however to acknowledge his miracles. But the caſe is widely altered, and it is as improper to inſiſt on this maxim now, as it might be proper then. We know now that miracles, real miracles, can be operated by no

power but that of God, nor for any purpoſe, by conſequence, but ſuch as infinite wiſdom and truth direct and ſanctify. We know therefore that no fact, nor doctrine, repugnant to the divine nature and attributes, can have been vouched by miracles, nor be taught in the word of God: and the difference is great between rejecting any ſuch facts or doctrines, and the authority on which they are founded, as in the caſe of the alcoran, for inſtance; and refuſing to admit all the facts and doctrines contained in a book proved by undeniable teſtimony of the fact to be the word of God; till, beſides this external proof, divines have furniſhed the internal proofs they boaſt of, which are often the wildeſt hypotheſes of imagination, and ſuch as a doctor of Mecca would hardly frame in behalf of the alcoran. Vain triflers! they pretend to develope the whole ſecret of a divine economy relative to man: and tho it be ſo eaſy to diſcern what is evidently inconſiſtent with the divine attributes, that every reaſonable man is able to diſcern it, yet theſe men are not ſtopped by ſuch evidence. The preſumptuous habits of theology carry them to talk of the plan, which they ſuppoſe infinite wiſdom to have formed, as if they viewed it from an higher ſtage of intelligence and knowledge. From theſe whimſical paradoxes they derive the greateſt part of what they call the internal evidence of the ſcriptures. On the whole, it is, I hope, plain by this time, that far from diſbelieving the hiſtory of the bible, I aſſert

I aſſert the authority of it, and endeavour to place it out of the reach of cavil; whilſt the divine does the contrary: for by taking the ſame liberty as he takes, and which every other man has the ſame right to take, ſome will pretend to find internal evidences of an human, where he pretends to find thoſe of a divine, original: and thus the authenticity of the ſcriptures, inſtead of being once for all fixed, will be rendered by theological oſtentation a matter of eternal diſpute. But ſtill I deny, that the example of the Iſraelites at and after the exode, under their judges, and under their kings, furniſhes any argument againſt me. All the facts contained in the moſaical hiſtory are true. Be it ſo, at leaſt for argument's ſake: but conſiſtently with them I may believe, nay conſiſtently with them I cannot believe otherwiſe, in oppoſition to Mr. Locke, and to all thoſe who went before him in aſſerting what he aſſerts, that mankind could not be polytheiſts and idolaters from the beginning, no, nor near the beginning; and conſequently that the belief and worſhip of the one true God could not be the national religion of the Iſraelites alone.

Let us conſider now what will reſult from another hypotheſis. We ſuppoſe then that men acquired, without any revelations general or particular, and by a due uſe of their reaſon, a knowledge of the one true God. That they might acquire it by theſe means, in former ages, can-

not be denied with any ſort of modeſty, or candor; ſince we are able to demonſtrate invincibly this great truth by the ſame means: and if they might acquire it, on what pretence can it be ſaid that they did not? Modern philoſophy has opened a more glorious proſpect of the works of God, than that which the antient nations appear to us to have had; and every new diſcovery adds to the magnificence of the ſcene, and to the force of the argument. But the great author of nature was always viſible in every part, even the moſt minute, of the ſyſtem of nature: and they who were far from ſeeing as much of it as we ſee, tho we too are far, very far ſurely, from ſeeing the whole, might eaſily obſerve an unity of deſign, which pointed out moſt evidently the unity of that Being by whoſe wiſdom the deſign was laid, and by whoſe power it was executed. All I aſſume therefore is, that among creatures to whom God has given ſenſe and intellect, there have been many at all times, who not only ſaw like the reſt what was viſible, but who diſcovered by reflection and contemplation what was intelligible, and yielded to the teſtimony God has given of himſelf. On this aſſumption we ſhall find reaſon to believe that genuine theiſm could be at no time confined to any one people, and that it muſt have been at different times, and in different places, diſcovered, eſtabliſhed, corrupted, loſt, and renewed, according to the viciſſitude of human affairs.

We repreſent the firſt communities of men roving about in herds, like ſome other animals, and ſuch as we ſee many of the ſavage people of the world at this hour. As long as they continued in that ſtate, the unity of God might be unknown to them, becauſe, reaſon operating much more ſlowly, and eſpecially in ſuch a ſtate, than the affections and paſſions of our nature, a multitude of ſuperſtitious notions, ariſing from ignorance and fear, could not fail to take poſſeſſion of the minds of theſe men, and to prevent or miſguide their reaſon. All the objects that ſurrounded them were new to them: and as they had not the experience of others to direct their judgment concerning the impreſſions which theſe objects made upon them, ſo their own experience came too late. The prejudices of ſuperſtition had rendered them inattentive to it, or unfit to make a reaſonable uſe of it, before it came. But this could not continue, even on this hypotheſis, to be long the univerſal ſtate of mankind.

Nations were civiliſed, wiſe conſtitutions of government were framed, arts and ſciences were invented and improved, long before the remoteſt time to which any hiſtory or tradition extends: and all this could not have been done without much more information of the moral and phyſical ſyſtem of the world, and much greater efforts of human reaſon, than were neceſſary to demonſtrate

ſtrate the firſt principle of true theiſm. Let us conclude, therefore, on grounds of the higheſt probability, that God was known to ſuch as made a due uſe of their reaſon, and demonſtrated by them to others, even in nations unknown to us; and, ſince he was known, that he was worſhiped: for to ſay he was known and not worſhiped, is little leſs abſurd than it would be to ſay he was worſhiped and not known.

But tho God was known and worſhiped, it will not follow that this knowledge and worſhip were preſerved, or even eſtabliſhed, any where in all the purity of theiſm. Were they ſo among the Iſraelites, who retained ſo many of the rites, and ceremonies, and ſuperſtitious opinions of the lower Egypt, tho they believed the unity of God, and abhorred idols, like the people of the upper? In ſhort, are they ſo at this time? Are they ſo among us? It has been obſerved in the foregoing eſſay, and I have juſt touched the ſame thing in this, that, the ſeeds of ſuperſtitious opinions and practices having been ſowed before nations were formed, or governments eſtabliſhed, it is not unreaſonable to believe that the firſt legiſlators cultivated them for political purpoſes: nay even ſuch as were neither polytheiſts, nor idolaters themſelves (for it is very reaſonable to ſuppoſe there were ſome ſuch) might nurſe up an abundant crop of ſuperſtition by the very means by which they deſigned to promote true religion. This we ſhall not

not think improbable if we conſult hiſtory, or if we conſider it analogically to the experience of our own age. To work effects contrary to the intention of them, is a fate that attends very frequently the beſt of human expedients: and the reflection does no honor to our wiſdom and foreſight. Private ambition grew up naturally among thoſe who intended nothing more by promoting religion, than the political purpoſes of government; and the enthuſiaſm of ſuperſtition aroſe ſtill more naturally among thoſe who promoted it, becauſe they believed in it. Both theſe motives contributed to corrupt genuine theiſm, to diſguiſe firſt, and to conceal afterwards, the ſimplicity of natural religion under the tinſel and the embroidery of polytheiſm and idolatry. From both of them proceeded ſo many falſe pretences of revelation and inſpiration, the legerdemain of miracles, and ſuch blaſphemous affectations of a divine nature, or miſſion, as the indian FOE, or the arabian MAHOMET, impoſed on a great part of mankind.

THAT men are capable of falling from the knowledge of the one true God into polytheiſm, and from a pure worſhip of him into idolatry and ſuperſtition, by ſuch means as I have mentioned, and by others, whether this knowledge and this worſhip were communicated to them by revelation, or diſcovered by the uſe of reaſon, as other truths are; this very reaſon, as well as experience, will evince. But the difference between

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the hypotheſis, which aſſumes that the unity of the Supreme Being was taught by revelation alone, confirmed by miracles, and delivered down by tradition; and the hypotheſis we go upon here, which aſſumes that this truth might be diſcovered by reaſon as well as by revelation at all times, and therefore muſt have been diſcovered at ſome times by thoſe who had no other guide but reaſon, deſerve to be conſidered a little more.

The propoſition which affirms that all the nations of the world, except the Iſraelites, were ignorant of the true God from the beginning, is, in many reſpects, to the laſt degree abſurd. It implies that the Iſraelities were a nation from the beginning. But were they ſo, if we reckon from Adam, or even from Noah, or even from the vocation of their father Abraham? If they were not ſo, why are they excepted as ſuch from the beginning out of the aſſumed general ignorance of mankind concerning the true God? Some divines will tell us, that tho God might be diſcovered, yet he could not be fully and certainly diſcovered, nor ſuch as he is, by reaſon alone. That he was pleaſed, therefore, to diſcover himſelf by immediate revelation, not to the bulk of mankind, but to patriarchs, to prophets, and to his choſen people, both when they were a family, and when they were a nation. That he has revealed himſelf ever ſince in the ſame manner, and to the ſame perſons, that is, to his elect, in the ſcriptures; which help them, ſays

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CALVIN in the ſixth chapter of the firſt book of his Inſtitution, like ſpectacles to read diſtinctly and clearly what others diſcern confuſedly and imperfectly. But they who compare the ideas and notions concerning the Supreme Being that reaſon collects from the phaenomena of nature, phyſical and moral, which we know to be the works of God, with thoſe that the books of the Old teſtament, which we ſuppoſe to be his word, give us, will be apt to lay theſe ſpectacles aſide, and to conclude that the God of ABRAHAM, ISAAC, and JACOB cannot be that glorious ſupreme all-perfect Being whom reaſon ſhewed them, and whom they diſcerned with their naked eyes. But again: what do thoſe words "all the "nations of the world" ſignify? If we underſtand them literally, they affirm what it is impoſſible the affirmers ſhould know to be true. If we underſtand by them, as we are apt to do, a few nations only, ſuch as were formed on the firſt repeopling of the world by NOAH, and his immediate deſcendants, they affirm what is ſtill more improbable. In a word, this propoſition ſtands in direct contradiction to the other, which is part of the ſame hypotheſis; for if the knowledge of the true God was communicated by revelation, and propagated by the firſt men, who were witneſſes of this revelation, according to the moſaical account, the true God muſt have been univerſally known in the beginning, and from the beginning. This needs no proof, it is ſelf-evident; and they who will maintain

maintain that the nations of the world were ignorant of the true God from the beginning, with any conſiſtency, muſt give up MOSES; and inſtead of aſſuming ſuch a revelation, and a tradition in conſequence of it, they muſt admit that all men were ignorant of the true God, till ſome of them diſcovered this great truth by philoſophical obſervation and meditation, and communicated it to others, as it is ſaid that ABRAHAM did.

THEY may ſuppoſe, as much as they pleaſe, that the tradition was worn out, and the knowledge loſt entirely, in leſs time than would have been ſufficient to deſtroy the memory of the moſt trifling events, and the leaſt important opinions. Even this will not ſave their hypotheſis. On the ſuppoſition of ſuch a revelation, and of ſuch a tradition, it would be ſtill abſurd to aſſert that all the nations of the world were ignorant of the true God from the beginning; as it would be hard, on the ſuppoſition that this knowledge was ever entirely loſt among men, to account for the belief of one Supreme Being, which prevailed in the eſoterical or ſecret doctrines of philoſophers, whilſt their exoterical or public doctrines were favorable to polytheiſm. All this, a general ignorance and a particular knowledge, can be accounted for no other way than by admitting, not only that the knowledge of one Supreme Being is to be acquired by reaſon, without the neceſſity of any revelation or

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of any miracles to impoſe it, and that it has been ſo acquired in the improved, tho not in the original ſtate of mankind; but alſo that it may be, and has been eſtabliſhed in general and national belief, at certain times, and under the influence of favorable conjunctures among ſeveral antient nations. The authority of revelation, if God revealed himſelf to men in any other manner than by his works, being conveyed down by tradition, and this tradition being ſpent in a long tract of time, and by the various accidents which happen according to the courſe of human affairs, nothing would remain to keep up, or to renew, this belief in the minds of men. But the authority of reaſon ceaſing to be exerted, or ceaſing to prevail, reaſon would ſtill remain, and be at hand to renew this belief, and propagate it again in a more happy ſeaſon. Revelation deſcends like a torrent, and bears down all before it, whilſt the tradition of it is freſh and ſtrong. But this force diminiſhes gradually; the ſtream grows feeble, and ceaſes at laſt to run, by a neceſſity ariſing from the nature of things. The ſtream whereof reaſon is the ſource, may be obſtructed in it's courſe; it may creep ſcarce perceived in the ſame channels, for it may diſappear entirely: but when it rolls no longer on the ſurface, it runs under ground, and is ever ready to break out anew.

Our phyſical and moral ſyſtems are carried round in one perpetual revolution, from generation

ration to corruption, and from corruption to generation; from ignorance to knowledge, and from knowledge to ignorance; from barbarity to civility, and from civility to barbarity. Arts and ſciences grow up, floriſh, decay, die, and return again under the ſame or other forms, after periods which appear long to us, however ſhort they may be compared with the immenſe duration of the ſyſtems of created being. Theſe periods are ſo diſproportionate to all human means of preſerving the memory of things, that when the ſame things return, we take frequently, for a new diſcovery, the revival of an art or ſcience long before known. It is much the ſame with opinions, and even with many demonſtrated principles of knowledge. The moſt abſurd of the former come into public vogue, as well as the moſt evident of the latter; and the latter go out of it again, as well as the former. Let us deſcend into ſome particulars that may ſerve to illuſtrate what is here ſaid.

When we look into the hiſtory of the Greeks and Romans, how ignorant do theſe people appear to have been in the art of navigation? In what cockboats was the fate of the war decided at Salamis? What idea muſt we have even of the carthaginian fleets, when we ſee them vanquiſhed by a people whoſe ſkill had gone, till the firſt Punic war, little farther than hollowing trees into miſhapen and unwieldy canoes*? How

* Caudicariae naves.

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ſlow was the progreſs of this art afterwards? Confined to the Mediterranean, and attempting little and ſeldom the Ocean, obliged in both to cling to the ſhore †, the ſtouteſt of their ſhips of war would have foundered where a Deal yawl rides ſecurely. Shall we conclude now from theſe repreſentations, that they ſhew us the beginning of navigation? No. We ſee in them the decay of the art. To enquire critically into the voyages of BACCHUS, of HERCULES, of JASON; to fix the times when theſe heroes floriſhed, or when MINOS held the dominion of the ſea, would be impertinent induſtry. It is enough to know, that tho the Greeks were frightened at the flux and reflux of the ſea, that new and aſtoniſhing phaenomenon to this knowing people even at the time of ALEXANDER's expedition, the indian ocean, rough as it is, had been explored long before by merchants who ſailed from the coaſt of Arabia and Egypt. If HERCULES erected his columns at the mouth of the Streights, the Phenicians paſſed beyond them. They viſited the coaſts of Portugal, the Fortunate iſlands, or the Canaries, and even the utmoſt Thule; perhaps the other hemiſphere, and the iſlands at leaſt, which COLUMBUS had the honor of diſcovering ſome thouſands of years afterwards. The ſhips of MIDACRITUS, or MELCARTUS, traverſed the bay of Biſcay, and brought lead or tin "ex Caſſiteride inſula," probably from Cornwall. This we learn from ob-

† Legere et radere littus.

ſcure tradition: and what do we ſee in the clearer light of hiſtory but the reſtoration of this very art? We have ſpoke of an art, let us ſpeak now of a ſcience.

ASTRONOMY had made a low figure among the Greeks for ſome time before HIPPARCHUS, who lived about the time of the ſixth or ſeventh of the PTOLEMY's: and tho we hear much of the fame of THALES, of PYTHAGORAS, and EUDOXUS, yet aſtronomy and aſtrology, which we diſtinguiſh very properly, were in thoſe days confounded together. Men were much more attentive to diſcover the imaginary influences of the ſtars, than to obſerve their real motions: and the honors done to BEROSUS by the Athenians, for his divine predictions, ſhew us in what manner, and to what purpoſes, this ſcience was cultivated a little before HIPPARCHUS, that is, in the time of ALEXANDER. HIPPARCHUS invented mathematical inſtruments for obſerving the celeſtial phaenomena; and obſerved, it is ſaid, very accurately. PTOLEMY, another aſtronomer, came after him; and tho he made ſome pretenſions to aſtrology, as others had done, yet he was an aſtronomer in the proper ſenſe. He improved on the improvements of HIPPARCHUS, and the ſyſtem which bears his name was univerſally received. It continued to be ſo till COPERNICUS aroſe. But if we conclude from hence, that we ſee the whole riſe and progreſs of aſtronomy, or that COPERNICUS was the author

thor of a new ſyſtem, we ſhall be much deceived. We ſee aſtronomy in it's decayed and corrupt ſtate, and we ſee it recover from thence and return back to it's true principles. The beginnings of it among the Egyptians and the Chaldeans, if in truth it did begin among them, the progreſs they made, and the degree of perfection to which they carried it, are unknown to us. But beſides ſeveral probable reaſons, which determine us to think that they carried it very far, we know certainly that the true ſolar ſyſtem, which COPERNICUS diſcovered about two hundred years ago, was taught in the pythagorean ſchools above two thouſand years ago, and was by conſequence that of the ſchools of Egypt and Babylonia.

To ſpeak now of opinions, and of the ſelf-evident or demonſtrated principles of real knowledge. The former fluctuate perpetually: when one of them alone can be true, a thouſand that ſtand in direct oppoſition to one another are entertained. Whilſt they laſt they are unſteady; time and experience explode them often: and when they return into uſe again, they are ſeldom exactly the ſame. The latter are fixed and uniform: time and experience confirm them, they cannot be exploded, they may be unknown, or they may be forgot; but whenever they are perceived by the mind, far from degenerating into opinions, they are perceived by every mind alike. Thus I think we are to underſtand that axiom of the Stoician BALBUS,

" Opinionum commenta delet dies, naturae ju-
" dicia confirmat." It may be, it has been ſaid, that the latter part of this axiom is often contradicted by experience, and that falſe demonſtrations have taken often the place of true, as opinions merely probable, nay improbable, have paſſed among whole nations for the moſt demonſtrated truths. But I ſuſpect that this has been the caſe in appearance rather, than in reality; or that the exceptions are too few to invalidate the general rule. Truths that may be called properly the judgments of nature, becauſe they are conformable to the nature of things, and have been deduced from thence by a proceſs of reaſoning, in every ſtep of which the mind has had intuitive knowledge, cannot be removed, they muſt be confirmed, by time; the nature of things and the reaſon of men continuing the ſame. But theſe very truths may be ſo diſguiſed by opinions which are thought to be compatible with them, which muffle them up, and which cling to them, tho they be parts of them no more than cloaths are parts of body, that the ſame principle of real knowledge, profeſſed by different people, or at different times, appears to be a different principle. If DIAGORAS, or THEODORUS, or VANINI, or any other particular atheiſt, for a community of atheiſts never exiſted out of Mr. BAYLE's head, had been aſked, whether it is not the intereſt of every individual to ſubmit to government, and to promote the good of ſociety; or if any theiſt had been

been aſked, whether this be not the duty, as well as intereſt, of every individual; they would all have anſwered in the affirmative, and have aſſented to theſe firſt principles of public and private morality. Notwithſtanding this, what a variety of opinions has there not been about this intereſt and this duty? They have been ſo various, as well as the practice of men conſequent from them, that whoever conſiders his own, or paſt ages, may be tempted to think, that in ſome countries the obligation of ſubmitting to government is eſteemed unconditional, and illimited; and in others, no obligation at all; or that, as he ſees no country wherein the common duties of ſociety are enough obſerved, ſo there are others wherein every man deems himſelf an individual, independent by nature, and diſavows any ſuch duty. Suppoſe now that in one of theſe countries liberty be eſtabliſhed on a ſyſtem of law, equally diſtant from tyranny, and from licentiouſneſs: ſuppoſe that in another ſuch a reformation of manners be wrought, no matter by what means, that the duties of morality are practiſed in it univerſally, and with the utmoſt exactneſs: ſhall we conclude from theſe examples that in the former caſe the principles of public, and in the latter thoſe of private, morality were never known, or had been loſt, and were then demonſtrated anew? Shall we not rather conclude, according to the truth of things, that theſe principles have been always known, and that the new eſtabliſhment, and the new reformation,

do nothing more than ſtrip them of the falſe opinions which were ſo complicated with them, that men derived their inſtitutions and notions, not from the ſure judgments of nature, but from the falſe comments of opinion * ?

THUS again, the exiſtence of one, ſupreme, ſelf-exiſtent and all-perfect Being, the firſt intelligent cauſe of all things, was acknowledged, as we diſcern more or leſs clearly by almoſt all our antient traditions, in thoſe nations who had any pretence to be eſteemed civiliſed; and moſt directly and explicitely in thoſe that were the moſt enlightened by knowledge. But yet this bright and luminous truth, this judgment of nature, was clouded by ſuch a multitude of ſuperſtitious notions, that it appeared dubiouſly: and that ſomething, which ſeemed repugnant to it, might have been objected to every nation, who profeſſed it in their outward, or even in their ſecret, doctrine. An orthodox Iſraelite was ſcandaliſed, no doubt, when he beheld among his heathen neighbours their deceaſed kings and heroes erected into divinities, and adored as ſuch. But we may aſſure ourſelves, that an inhabitant of Thebes in Egypt, who acknowledged no god but the unborn eternal KNEPH; or even a poly-

* N. B. There is a paſſage in POLYBIUS worth being turned to on this occaſion. It is in the thirteenth book. He obſerves there how truth is diſguiſed, or concealed by the falſe opinions of men; but he inſiſts, that theſe laſt for a time only, and that truth prevails always.

theiſt,

theiſt, who worſhiping many gods, that is, inferior divinities, acknowledged ſtill one Supreme Being, the monarch of gods and men; was not leſs ſcandaliſed when he ſaw this Being, of whom he had the ſublimeſt conceptions that the mind of man can frame, degraded into the rank of a local tutelary divinity, the God of ABRAHAM, of ISAAC, and of JACOB, the God of one family, and one nation, of a family who had ſtrolled into Egypt for bread, of a nation who had been long ſlaves in that country. In vain would the learned prieſts of all ſides have explained their ſymbolical rites and myſtic doctrines. The Iſraelite would have remained convinced, that the one true God was unknown to the heathen; and the heathen, that he was unknown to the Iſraelite. It fared with this principle of knowledge, as PLUTARCH obſerves in one of his miſcellaneous tracts, in the manner that it fares with the virtues. The prudence of ULYSSES appeared different from that of NESTOR, and the juſtice of CATO from that of AGESILAUS. The ſame principle of knowledge, derived from the ſame uſe of reaſon, took various appearances from the various opinions that were complicated with it in the minds of men, much as the ſame virtue took a different hue according to the different tempers, characters, and circumſtances of thoſe who profeſſed and practiſed it.

THIS ſeems to have been the ſtate of things till the coming of CHRIST. Whether the know-

ledge and the worſhip of the one true God were taught by revelation, or by reaſon, that which is affirmed concerning them cannot be true. In the firſt caſe, they muſt have been known from the beginning by all the people of the earth, and long before the Iſraelites grew up to be a nation. In the ſecond caſe, the man who ſhould aſſert that ABRAHAM, or any other of the patriarchs, was alone able to make theſe diſcoveries by dint of reaſon, and philoſophical reflection, would not deſerve a ſerious anſwer. Nay further, if we go upon the firſt ſuppoſition, that of revelation, if we take the words of ſome divines, that this belief and worſhip could be communicated no other way to mankind, and that this ſacred depoſite was truſted to a people choſen to preſerve it till the coming of the Meſſiah; this aſſumption will appear as little conformable to the reaſon of things, as ſeveral others are which the ſame men advance to be parts of the divine economy, and for which they appeal to the reaſon of mankind. Reaſon will pronounce, that no people was leſs fit than the Iſraelites to be choſen for this great truſt on every account. They broke the truſt continually; and the miracles, that were wrought to preſerve it notwithſtanding their apoſtaſies, would have preſerved it at leaſt as well all over the world. Beſides, the revelations made to them were "ſhut "up in a little corner of the world, amongſt a "people by that very law, which they received "with it, excluded from a commerce and com-

"munication

"munication with the reſt of mankind," as Mr. LOCKE * obſerves very truly. A people ſo little known, and contemned, and thought vilely of by thoſe nations that did know them, were therefore very "unfit, and unable to propagate the "doctrine of one God in the world."

BUT wherefore, then, was this depoſite made to them? It was of no uſe to other nations before the coming of CHRIST, nor ſerved to prepare them for the reception of his goſpel; and after his coming, it was in this great reſpect of little uſe, if of any, to the Jews themſelves. They believed univerſally one God, but they were not univerſally diſpoſed to believe in his Son. Monotheiſm might indiſpoſe them to the goſpel, as well as their attachment to the law of MOSES. The expectation of the Meſſiah did not claſh with monotheiſm. But they might imagine, that the belief of God the Son, and God the Holy Ghoſt, did ſo very manifeſtly; the trinity not having been early reconciled to the unity of God. Other nations ſeemed to be better prepared by philoſophy, by that of PLATO in particular, and by the polytheiſtical notions of divine natures, ſome in the godhead, and ſome out of it, for the reception of the goſpel, or of the theology which the preachers of the goſpel taught. Accordingly we find, that when CHRIST came, and threw down the wall of partition, if

* Reaſonableneſs of chriſtianity.

he did throw it down, and not St. PAUL, the miracles wrought to propagate chriſtianity had greater effect out of Judaea than in it. On the whole matter, it is impoſſible to conceive, on grounds of human reaſon, to what purpoſe a divine economy, relative to the coming of CHRIST, ſhould have confined the knowledge of the true God to the Jews, and have left the reſt of mankind without God in the world. On the other ſide, if men diſcovered the Creator of all things by their obſervations and their reaſonings, things muſt have paſſed much as the memorials of antient times give us grounds to believe that they did paſs. The knowledge of the true God muſt have been uncertainly propagated, and uncertainly maintained; it muſt have been never loſt, but always liable to be darkened by too much ignorance and ſtupidity in ſome, and too much imaginary knowledge, and the endleſs refinements of opinion in others.

THAT our Saviour found the whole world in a ſtate of error concerning this firſt principle of natural religion, tho not of abſolute darkneſs, is allowed; and that the ſpreading of chriſtianity has contributed to deſtroy polytheiſm and idolatry is true. But that, which Mr. LOCKE advances to have been the conſequence of this great event, is not true. It is not true, that God has been made known to the world by this revelation with ſuch evidence and energy, that polytheiſm and

and idolatry have been no where able to withſtand it. On the contrary, orthodox theiſm has not prevailed in ſome countries where it has been taught. In others, chriſtianity has been eſtabliſhed on the ruins of polytheiſm and idolatry, and has been rooted up again in it's turn. Revelation has had no better ſucceſs than reaſon. Neither has been able to preſerve the purity of the doctrines they taught, nor an uniformity in the practice they preſcribed. Nay mahometiſm, a religion inſtituted by an arabian freebooter, who impoſed himſelf for a prophet of God, and compoſed that extravagant rhapſody of ſuperſtition and enthuſiaſm, the Koran, has been further propagated than chriſtianity, and that not by the ſword alone, no more than chriſtianity. MAHOMET and the firſt caliphs eſtabliſhed their religion by the ſucceſs and terror of their arms. But ſince that time it has been extended by ſpiritual conqueſts: and not only the conquered, but the conquerors, for ſuch the Turks were, have embraced it. CHRIST, his apoſtles, and the firſt preachers of chriſtianity, eſtabliſhed this religion by their miracles, and by their ſufferings. But ſince that time it has been propagated and preſerved by violence as great at leaſt, as that which the Saracens employed to eſtabliſh the other. But however, and by what means ſoever, theſe religions have been extended, that of MAHOMET has taught the unity of God in terms ſo clear, and ſo preciſe,

as

as to leave no room for any opinions that may be ſo much as ſtrained into polytheiſm; and has ſo effectually baniſhed all kinds of images, that the moſt groſs and ſuperſtitious of the vulgar cannot have the leaſt occaſion of ſliding into idolatry.

CHRIST found the world in darkneſs and error. But if he was to come again, would he not find it in the ſame ſtate? Would he find even the religion he came to eſtabliſh, either practiſed, or even taught, in it's genuine purity? Would he not find the decalogue ſhortened, and the creed lengthened, by ſome Chriſtians? Would he not find the creed ſhortened by others, who left the decalogue of the ſame ſize, even by Mr. LOCKE himſelf? Chriſtianity has been, from the inſtitution of it, in a perpetual flux, not relatively to certain opinions alone, that may be deemed indifferent, or not quite eſſential; but relatively to fundamental articles, on which the whole ſyſtem leans. Let me produce one inſtance, which will illuſtrate, and confirm, what has been ſaid againſt thoſe, who take ſo much pains to make us believe, that polytheiſm and idolatry prevailed among the nations of the world from the beginning, Arianiſm had very nearly prevailed in the chriſtian church. It was all that intrigue could do to check, and all that wars and perſecutions, wherein millions periſhed, could do to extirpate, this hereſy. Let us ſuppoſe now

now that theſe ſalutary methods had proved ineffectual, and that the orthodox faith was at this time creeping about in corners, as the arian faith actually is, and was preſerved only by a few rational and thinking men, who were fain, in their outward profeſſion and worſhip, to go with the herd, and to keep to the religion eſtabliſhed by law: I aſk, would it be fair to conclude, that the orthodox faith had never been the faith of the chriſtian church, and that this abominable hereſy had been eſtabliſhed from the beginning? It would not be ſo moſt certainly. To recapitulate, therefore, and to conclude: I think it plain, that the knowledge and worſhip of the one true God muſt have been the religion of mankind for a long time, if the moſaical hiſtory be authentic, and was not therefore confined from the beginning to the family of SEM, nor to the Iſraelites, who pretended to be of it. I think it plain, that the aſſumed confinement of this orthodox faith and worſhip could anſwer no imaginable deſign of a divine economy, preparatory to the coming of CHRIST; ſince the Jews, who had it, were not better prepared than the Gentiles, who are ſaid not to have had it, to receive and embrace the goſpel; and ſince this doctrine was propagated much more by heathen philoſophers than by Jewiſh doctors. I think it plain, that, if we ſuppoſe the unity of God to have been diſcovered by reaſon, and to have been propagated by human authority merely,

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the belief of it muſt have gone through all the viciſſitudes, and have been expoſed to all the corruptions, that appear to have attended it. I add, that we have the leſs reaſon to be ſurpriſed at this, or to doubt of it, ſince we ſee that very faith, which God himſelf came on earth to publiſh, which was confirmed by miracles, and recorded by divine inſpiration, ſubject to the ſame viciſſitudes and the ſame corruptions.

ESSAY

ESSAY THE FOURTH:

CONCERNING

AUTHORITY

IN MATTERS OF

RELIGION.

ESSAY

THE FOURTH.

SECTION I.

ALL men are apt to have an high conceit of their own underſtandings, and to be tenacious of the opinions they profeſs: and yet almoſt all men are guided by the underſtandings of others, not by their own; and may be ſaid more truly to adopt, than to beget, their opinions. Nurſes, parents, pedagogues, and after them all, and above them all, that univerſal pedagogue cuſtom, fill the mind with notions which it had no ſhare in framing, which it receives as paſſively as it receives the impreſſions of outward objects, and which, left to itſelf, it would never have framed perhaps, or would have examined afterwards. Thus prejudices are eſtabliſhed by education, and habits by cuſtom. We are taught to think what others think, not how to think for ourſelves: and whilſt the memory is loaded, the underſtanding remains

un-exerciſed, or exerciſed in ſuch trammels as conſtrain it's motions, and direct it's pace, till that which was artificial becomes in ſome ſort natural, and the mind can go no other.

WRONG notions, and falſe principles, begot in this manner by authority, may be called properly enough the baſtards of the mind: and yet they are nurſed and preſerved by it as if they were the legitimate iſſue; nay they are even deemed to be ſo by the mind itſelf. The mind grows fond of them accordingly: and this miſtaken application of ſelf-love makes men zealous to defend and propagate them by the ſame kind of authority, and by every other ſort of impoſition. Thus they are perpetuated: and as they contract the ruſt of antiquity they grow to be more reſpected. The fact, that was delivered at firſt on very ſuſpicious teſtimony, becomes indiſputable; and the opinion, that was ſcarce problematical, becomes a demonſtrated propoſition. Nor is this at all wonderful. We look at original, through intermediate, authority; and it appears greater and better than it is really: juſt as objects of ſight are ſometimes magnified by an hazy medium. Men who would have been deemed ignorant, or mad, or knaviſh, if they had been our cotemporaries, are reverenced as prodigies of learning, of wiſdom, and of virtue, becauſe they lived many centuries ago. When their writings come down to poſterity, poſterity might judge indeed of their characters

on better grounds than report and tradition: but the ſame authority, which ſhewed them in a half light, ſcreens them in a full one. Paraphraſes and commentaries accompany their writings. Their miſtakes are excuſed, their contradictions are ſeemingly reconciled, their abſurdities are varniſhed over, their puerilities are repreſented as marks of a moſt amiable ſimplicity, their enthuſiaſtical rants as the language of the moſt ſublime genius, or even of inſpiration. And as this is frequently done with much ſkilful plauſibility, ſo it is always aided by the ſtrong prepoſſeſſions that have been created in their favor. The firſt traditional authorities that handed down fantaſtic ſcience, and erroneous opinions, might be no better than the original authorities that impoſed them. But they were ſufficient for the time: and when error had once taken root deeply in the minds of men, tho knowledge increaſed, and reaſon was better cultivated, yet they ſerved principally to defend and embelliſh it. Truths, that have been diſcovered in the moſt enlightened ages and countries, have been by ſuch means as theſe ſo blended with the errors of the darkeſt, that the whole maſs of learning, which we boaſt of at this hour, muſt be ſeparated, and ſifted at great expence, like the ore of a poor mine; and like that too, will hardly pay the coſts.

It may ſound oddly, but it is true in many caſes to ſay, that if men had learned leſs, their

way to knowledge would be ſhorter and eaſier. It is indeed ſhorter and eaſier to proceed from ignorance to knowledge, than from error. They who are in the laſt, muſt unlearn before they can learn to any good purpoſe: and the firſt part of this double taſk is not in many reſpects the leaſt difficult; for which reaſon it is ſeldom undertaken. The vulgar, under which denomination we muſt rank, on this occaſion, almoſt all the ſons of ADAM, content themſelves to be guided by vulgar opinions. They know little, and believe much. They examine and judge for themſelves in the common affairs of life ſometimes; and not always even in theſe. But the greateſt and the nobleſt objects of the human mind are very tranſiently, at beſt, the objects of theirs. On all theſe they reſign themſelves to the authority that prevails among the men with whom they live. Some of them want the means, all of them want the will, to do more: and as abſurd as this may appear in ſpeculation, it is beſt, perhaps, upon the whole, the human nature and the nature of government conſidered, that it ſhould be as it is.

SCHOLARS and philoſophers will demand to be excepted out of the vulgar, in this ſenſe. But they have not a juſt claim to be ſo excepted. They profeſs to ſeek truth without any other regard; and yet the taſk of unlearning error is too hard for them. They ſet out in this ſearch with the ſame prejudices and the ſame habits

that they who neglect it have; and they lean on authority in more caſes than the others. If they improve and employ their reaſon more, it is only to degrade her the more; for they employ her always in ſubordination to another guide, and never truſt themſelves wholly to her conduct, even when authority cannot have the appearance of authority without her approbation. The taſk of unlearning error, and laying authority aſide in the ſearch of truth, is not only hard in itſelf, but it becomes harder ſtill by two conſiderations, as it implies a ſelf-denial of vanity, and of ambition. Scholars are oſtentatious of their learning: and tho he who has read much will not arrive at truth ſo ſoon, nor ſo ſurely, as he who has thought much, yet will he make a greater glare, and draw more admiration to himſelf. The man who accumulates authorities of philoſophers, of fathers, and of councils, to eſtabliſh an opinion that muſt be founded in reaſon, and be agreeable to the common ſenſe of mankind, or be founded in nothing; is not unlike the child who chooſes a crown in ſeveral pieces of braſs, rather than a guinea in one piece of gold. Thus, again, we muſt not imagine that we behold an example of modeſty and moderation when we ſee a whole ſect of philoſophers ſubmit to the authority of one, as pagans, Chriſtians, and Mahometans did in their turns, and for many ages, to that of ARISTOTLE; whilſt they dared to reaſon in no other form, nor on any other principles than thoſe which he had preſcribed. It is in truth

an example of rank ambition. Such men, like the ſlaves who domineer in abſolute monarchies, intend by their ſubmiſſion to a ſupreme tyrant to acquire the means of exerciſing tyranny in their turns.

THERE are innumerable caſes in common life, and many in arts and ſciences, wherein we muſt content ourſelves, according to the condition of our nature, with probability, and rely on authority for want of the means, or opportunities, of knowledge. I rely on the authority of my cook, when I eat my ſoup; on the authority of my apothecary, when I take a doſe of rhubarb; on that of GRAHAM, when I buy my watch; and on that of Sir ISAAC NEWTON, when I believe in the doctrine of gravitation; becauſe I am neither cook, apothecary, watchmaker, nor mathematician. But I am a rational creature, and am therefore obliged to judge for myſelf in all thoſe caſes where reaſon alone is the judge; the judge of the thing itſelf: for even in the others, reaſon is the judge of the authority. My parſon might reproach me very juſtly with the folly of going through the journey of life without opening the eyes of my mind, and employing my intellectual ſight. But my parſon grows impertinent when he would perſuade me, like thoſe of your church, to remain in voluntary blindneſs; or, like thoſe of ours, to let him ſee for me, tho my eyes are open, tho my faculties of viſion are at leaſt as good as his, and tho I have all the

the ſame objects of ſight before my eyes that he has before his.

RESIGNATION to authority will appear the more abſurd, if we conſider, that by it we run two riſks inſtead of one. We may deceive ourſelves no doubt: but is the divine, is the philoſopher, infallible? We ſhall not mean to deceive ourſelves moſt certainly; but the divine, or the philoſopher, may intend to deceive us: he may find his account in it, and deceit may be his trade. Had theſe men that ſuperiority over others, which ſome of them have aſſumed; did the ſublime objects of divine philoſophy appear to them, tho they do not appear ſo to us, in the effulgence of an immediate and direct light, there would be ſome better reaſon than there is for a dependence on their authority, at leaſt in one reſpect. We might own their knowledge ſufficient to eſtabliſh this authority, whatever we thought of their candor and ſincerity. But God has dealed more equally with his human creatures. There is no ſuch ſuperiority of ſome over others. They who exerciſe their reaſon, and improve their knowledge the moſt, are dazzled and blinded whenever they attempt to look beyond the reflected light wherein it is given us to contemplate the exiſtence, the nature, the attributes, and the will, of God relatively to man. They who pretend to face, like ſo many intellectual eagles, the ſun of eternal wiſdom, and to ſee in that abyſs of ſplendor,

are ſo truly metaphyſical madmen, that he who attends to them, and relies on them, muſt be mad likewiſe.

THE more important any ſubject is, the more reaſon we have to be on our guard againſt the impoſitions and ſeductions of authority, and to judge in the beſt manner we can for ourſelves. The all-wiſe God has diſpoſed the univerſal order ſo, that every man is, by his nature, capable of acquiring a certain and ſufficient knowledge of thoſe things which are the moſt important to him; whilſt he is left to probability and belief about others: and yet ſuch are the contradictions which reconcile themſelves to one another in the heads and hearts of men, that even they who perceive the importance of the ſubject, and are not delivered over by a ſupine neglect to authority, are however deterred by an unreaſonable timidity from the uſe of their own judgments, and are determined by an affection of their minds, in oppoſition to common ſenſe, to deliver themſelves over to the prevalent authority, whatever that be. Thus they, who invade the reaſon of mankind triumph, not by their own ſtrength, but by the prejudices of the invaded. Their ſucceſs may be compared to that of a certain prince who placed, it is ſaid, cats and other animals, adored by the Egyptians, in the front of his army when he invaded that people. A reverence for theſe phantoms made the Egyptians lay down their arms, and become an eaſy conqueſt.

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THIS timidity is the leſs excuſable, becauſe the divine wiſdom, as I hinted above, has been pleaſed to manifeſt to us a rule of inquiry and judgment in matters of divine philoſophy and natural religion, that is ſure as far as it goes: and it goes moſt certainly as far as the ſame wiſdom intended that our inquiries and judgments ſhould proceed. It ſerves at once both to direct and limit them. God has ſhewn theſe great objects to us in a light reflected from his works, and proportioned to our nature. He has ſhewn them in no other, in the ordinary courſe of his providence. The way therefore to avoid fantaſtical, and to attain ſome degree of real, knowledge concerning them is to apply ourſelves to a careful obſervation of the phaenomena of nature, corporeal and intellectual, as nature is commonly diſtinguiſhed. The true foundations of natural theology muſt be laid in natural philoſophy. So they have been laid in part at leaſt, by antient and modern theiſts, and by the latter eſpecially, ſince the wonderful diſcoveries that have been made by the improvement of experimental philoſophy; diſcoveries, that might ſend the wiſeſt men of antiquity, ſacred and profane, could they ariſe from the dead with all their wiſdom and all their learning about them, once more to ſchool.

THE foundations * of theiſm have been laid wider,

* THIS note is added a great number of years after I

wider, but they wanted no ſolidity before theſe diſcoveries. Theſe new proofs, nay all proofs beyond

had written what is contained in the text referred to, and after my opinions concerning the Supreme Being, and the proofs of his exiſtence, had been eſtabliſhed in my mind; becauſe I have lately found, in the Hiſtory of the royal academy of ſciences at Berlin for the year 1746, a diſſertation written by a very ingenious man, a very good philoſopher, and one with whom I have been long acquainted, that I cannot approve on many accounts. His avowed deſign is to deduce the proofs of God's exiſtence from the general, not any particular, laws of nature, and to deduce thoſe of motion and reſt metaphyſically from the attributes of the ſupreme intelligence.

To make way for this proof he rejects, or endeavours to weaken, every other proof, on this pretence, that the attempt to eſtabliſh truth on falſe reaſonings is the greateſt injury which can be done to it. I ſhall not take on me to examine his hypotheſis, how little ſoever I like the deduction of a phyſical hypotheſis from metaphyſical principles, inſtead of eſtabliſhing general, abſtract, or, if you pleaſe, metaphyſical axioms on particular experiments and obſervation.

Mr. Maupertuis lays no weight on the famous argument of Des Cartes taken from the idea of an infinite, all-perfect Being, which he ſuppoſes to be in the human mind: and Maupertuis is in the right. He ſays little on the aſſumed univerſal conſent of mankind to this great and fundamental truth: and he is not in the wrong. This conſent is not ſuch as it ſtands repreſented by many. It is general enough to ſhew the proportion which this truth bears to the univerſal reaſon of mankind: and I think it would

beyond thoſe which every obſerving man is able to draw even from an unphiloſophical view of the

would prove no more if it was ſtill more general. The actual exiſtence of ſuch a Being cannot be fairly deduced from it. He will not inſiſt, he ſays, on the argument which may be drawn from the intelligence whereof we are conſcious, to a firſt intelligence, infinite, and eternal, which is the original of all intelligence, and the firſt cauſe of all things: and yet I apprehend that he has given us none ſo good, by the help of metaphyſics and mathematics, as this, which is plain and obvious to the conception of every rational creature.

That ſome theiſts have reaſoned weakly from the phaenomena of nature to the exiſtence of God is, I believe, true; as I am ſure it is true that others would have made the doctrine of final cauſes ridiculous, if any thing could make it ſo, by the ridiculous application of it on every unworthy and trifling occaſion. But we muſt not learn from hence to deſpiſe all thoſe arguments which antient philoſophers drew from the beauty, order, and diſpoſition of the univerſe, on this ſmart conceit, that they knew too little of nature to have a right to admire it.

He is not ſatisfied neither with thoſe which Newton, and much leſs with thoſe which other naturaliſts have drawn from the ſame phaenomena. If he cites thoſe of Newton, it is only to ſhew how weak and inconcluſive even theſe are. Newton thought that the uniform motion of the planets proved itſelf neceſſarily to have been directed by choice, not by chance; and he ſhews the great probability of this doctrine. But then he thinks there remains probability enough on the other ſide, to hinder us from ſaying that this uniformity muſt have been neceſſarily

the ſyſtem of nature, are proofs ex abundantia. I honor moſt ſincerely thoſe philoſophers who have

rily the effect of choice; tho it ſhould be granted, agreeably to NEWTON's ſyſtem, that all the celeſtial bodies, being drawn towards the ſun, move in a vacuum. On the other hand he advances, that the force of NEWTON's argument being founded alone on the impoſſibility of aſſigning a phyſical cauſe of this uniformity in his hypotheſis, it will have no force with other philoſophers. The uniformity of theſe motions will not appear inexplicable to thoſe who admit a fluid matter, in which the planets are hurried round, or by which their motion is moderated. On this foot we are not reduced to the alternative of ſuppoſing either chance, or choice: and ſuch an uniformity of motion will prove the exiſtence of God no more than any other motion impreſſed on matter. This MAUPERTUIS ſays. But till the phyſical cauſe of the uniform motion of the planets has been explained intelligibly by the hypotheſis of a fluid, we muſt remain where we were, and have recourſe in one caſe, as well as in the other, to choice, or chance.

THIS philoſopher thinks that the argument, drawn by NEWTON from the formation of animals, has no more ſtrength than the former. He aſks, whether, if the uniformity of ſome be a proof on one ſide, the infinite variety of others will not be a proof on the other ſide? Now ſurely theſe proofs are ſo far from being contradictory, that they coincide. The eagle, the fly, the ſtag, the ſnail, the whale, and the oiſter are very different animals no doubt; and the immenſe variety of the different ſpecies of animals appropriated to different elements and purpoſes, diſplays the magnificence of the animal world, and the infinite power of it's author; as the uniformity of all thoſe

have endeavoured to raiſe the thoughts of men, by theſe diſcoveries, from the phaenomena up to

thoſe of the ſame ſpecies ſhews the deſign and wiſdom of that Being who created them, and appropriated them to the ſame elements, and to the ſame purpoſes. When we compare an eagle to a fly, we find a proof of one. When we compare an eagle to an eagle, we find a proof of the other. In ſhort the objection is founded in cavil, not in argument.

Mr. Maupertuis proceeds, and admits, but admits as if it were for argument's ſake alone, that the proportion of the different parts and organs of animals to their wants carries a more ſolid appearance; and he judges that they reaſon very ill, who aſſert that the uſes, to which theſe parts and organs are applied, were not the final cauſes of them, but that they are ſo applied becauſe the animal is ſo made. Chance gave eyes and ears; and ſince we have them, we make uſe of them to ſee and hear. He thinks however it may be ſaid, that, chance having produced an immenſe number of individuals, thoſe of them, whoſe parts and organs were proportioned to their wants, have ſubſiſted, whilſt thoſe who wanted this proportion have periſhed and diſappeared. Thoſe who had no mouth, for inſtance, could not eat, and live; thoſe who wanted the organs of generation could not perpetuate their ſpecies: and thus from the preſent ſtate of things theiſts draw an argument, which will appear fallacious when it is applied to the poſſible original of things.

To ridicule the proofs of this kind, he aſks, a little too triumphantly, what it ſignifies to diſcover appearances of order and proportion, if after this diſcovery we are ſtopped in our reaſoning by ſome untoward concluſion? He inſtances in the ſerpent, who can neither walk, nor fly, and

to the author of nature, inſtead of amuſing the world, like many others, with metaphyſical abſtractions.

and yet ſaves himſelf from the purſuit of other animals by the flexibility of his body, which enables him to crawl away faſter than many of them can follow him. The cold of the winter would chill him to death, if the form of his body, and the ſlippery ſmoothneſs of his ſkin, did not enable him likewiſe to creep through holes that hide him under the ground. This is the diſcovery. The untoward concluſion follows; and he aſks, to what purpoſe does all this ſerve? Why truly to none but the preſervation of an animal, whoſe bite is ſufficient to kill a man. Thus the philoſopher endeavours to deſtroy one proof of God's exiſtence, by begging the ſame queſtion as the divine begs, when he would prove that God is unjuſt, becauſe there is either phyſical or moral evil in the world; that is, by aſſuming man to be the final cauſe of the creation.

THE great and reſpectable perſons, ſuch as father MALBRANCHE, whoſe authority MAUPERTUIS cites againſt the order obſerved in the conſtruction of the univerſe, and who were at a loſs to comprehend how it could be the work of a Being infinitely wiſe and powerful, built their objections on the ſame aſſumption; and ran, as he obſerves, into many abſurd ſyſtems. But I wave entering any farther here into the conſideration of this aſſumption, and the uſe that is made of it, ſince I have taken occaſion to ſpeak fully about it in another place.

THE criticiſm he makes on that expreſſion which cloſes the firſt of Mr. POPE's ethic epiſtles, "whatever is, is right," cannot be maintained. The propoſition is not advanced as an argument to prove the exiſtence of God, nor as a profeſſion of faith, "un acte de foi." I preſume

ſtractions. But yet I think, that we wanted neither a BOYLE, nor a RAY, nor a DERHAM, nor

ſume Mr. POPE meaned it as a reaſonable conſequence of what he ſuppoſed already proved; and that when deſign and wiſdom were ſo evidently marked in all the works of God which are objects of human obſervation and knowledge, it became his creatures to conclude that the ſame wiſdom and deſign were employed in the whole, tho human obſervation and knowledge cannot reach to the whole; and therefore that he was juſtified, as he was moſt certainly, in pronouncing that "whatever is, is right." To ſay that this axiom tends to ſubmit all things to a fatal neceſſity, is not true. To ſay that it eſtabliſhes ſubmiſſion and reſignation to the divine providence, in oppoſition to the pride and preſumption of philoſophers and divines, is true. It is a truth which no man ſhould be aſhamed to own, and which every rational creature ſhould be aſhamed to contradict.

MAUPERTUIS himſelf admits enough to eſtabliſh this truth, when he admits that intelligence and deſign are perceivable in a multitude of the phaenomena; and yet he does not give up the point. It is not enough, he ſays, to prove intelligence and deſign. To prove the wiſdom of God, we muſt penetrate into the objects to which this intelligence and deſign were directed. Ability in the execution is inſufficient. To ſhew his wiſdom, we muſt prove his motives to have been reaſonable. To what purpoſe do we admire that regularity with which all the planets move the ſame way, almoſt in the ſame plane, and in orbits nearly alike, if we do not ſee that it is better that they ſhould move ſo, than otherwiſe; that is, if we have not diſcovered the ſufficient reaſon that LEIBNITZ requires in all caſes where things may be done more ways than

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nor a NEWYNTIT, to convince us of the ſelf-exiſtence of an intelligent Being, the firſt cauſe of all things: and I am ſure that we are much to blame if we want a BENTLEY, or a CLARKE, to put us in mind, for in truth they do no more, of the exiſtence of ſuch a Being. In ſhort, natural theology reſts on better foundations than authority of any kind: and the duties of natural religion, and the ſins againſt it, are held out to us by the conſtitution of our nature, and by daily experience, in characters ſo viſible, that he who runs may read them.

THESE revelations, for ſuch they may be properly called, are made to the reaſon of mankind: and the ſame reaſon, that collects them from the face of nature, is able to propagate the knowledge of them, and to find means of enforcing, as far as the general imperfection of our nature, and particular contingent circumſtances admit, a conduct ſuitable to them. But

one? A reaſonable man may content himſelf, without this ſufficient reaſon, in many caſes; and LEIBNITZ blundered grievouſly when he pretended to have found it in ſome. I doubt MAUPERTUIS has not ſucceeded better in deducing the firſt and univerſal laws of nature from the attributes of an all-wiſe and all-powerful Being, in order to ſhew, that ſince theſe laws, which are obſerved in the univerſe, are the very ſame which ſuch attributes muſt have produced, ſuch a Being muſt exiſt, and be the author of theſe laws. Happily we have no want of this demonſtration.

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men have not been contented to do this. They have imagined, or they have found in the frailty of the human nature, and the imperfection of the human ſtate, an apparent neceſſity of going farther; of adding art to nature, falſhood to truth, and their own inventions for divine communications. In order to make the impoſition paſs, they have ſet authority in the place of reaſon. The religion of nature, and therefore of the God of nature, is ſimple and plain; it tells us nothing which our reaſon is unable to comprehend, and much leſs any thing which is repugnant to it. Natural religion and reaſon are always agreed, they are always the ſame, and the whole economy of God's diſpenſations to man is of a piece. But religions, founded in the pretended revelations we ſpeak of here, grow voluminous and myſterious, oppoſe belief to knowledge, and, when they cannot ſtand a reaſonable examination, eſcape from reaſon by aſſuming that they are above it. Many ſuch religions have appeared in the world. We Chriſtians reject them all, not only becauſe they carry moſt evident marks of impoſture, but becauſe there can be no more than one true revelation, and that is undoubtedly the revelation we acknowledge: for chooſing of which however, and for rejecting the others, we muſt confeſs that we had no reaſon at all, or we muſt confeſs that the truth of a revelation is an object of reaſon, and to be tried by it.

Religions, inſtituted by men who thought themſelves inſpired when they were only mad, or by men who were thought to be inſpired when they were only cheats, reſt on the mere authority of their founder, maintained and improved by his diſciples, and their ſucceſſors. Reaſon had no ſhare in examining the original pretended revelation, nor has much in examining the deſcent of the tradition that preſerves it. How could reaſon have any ſhare in examining and controlling the firſt, on which the laſt, and all the conſequences of an impoſture, depend, among men ignorant and credulous, or who were prepared by ſuperſtition to believe revelation no uncommon event? The enthuſiaſt was not enough in his ſenſes to reflect, that, in order to be aſſured he had a revelation from God, it was neceſſary he ſhould have not only a lively inward ſentiment of the divine truth that he ſuppoſed revealed to him, but alſo a clear and diſtinct perception of the time and manner in which this ſupernatural operation was performed. The impoſtor was enough in his ſenſes to know, that no one was able to prove he had not the revelations he pretended to have; becauſe no man is able any more to perceive the perceptions of another man's mind, however occaſioned, than to ſee an outward object by the eyes, or to hear a ſound by the ears, of another. Believers in men of both theſe characters were never wanting; and far from examining, it became a merit not to examine.

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"He ſaid it," was foundation enough for an article of faith in the pythagorean religion: and the ſame proof was ſufficient to eſtabliſh the religion of Foe, that began in India, was propagated into China, and ſpread in ſeveral ſects all over the eaſt. The ſame obſervation may be made on other religions that have been impoſed by the force of authority, no matter how acquired, on ignorant and ſuperſtitious people at firſt, and on thoſe of more ſenſe and knowledge when the authority was grown too ſtrong to be ſhaken. But chriſtianity was not ſo impoſed: and nothing can be more plain than this, that God ſubmitted the authority of his revelation, at the time he gave it, and therefore at every later time much more, to the reaſon of the creatures to whom he gave it.

When we conſider the great and glorious purpoſes of this revelation, the manner in which, and the perſon, even the Son of God himſelf, by whom it was made; and all the ſtupendous miracles in the heavens, and on earth, that were wrought to confirm it; we are ready to conclude that ſuch a revelation muſt have left reaſon nothing to do, muſt have forced conviction, and have taken away even the poſſibility of doubt. This conſequence ſeems ſo neceſſary, that if ſuch events were ſtated hypothetically, the hypotheſis would be rejected as defective and inconſiſtent, unleſs they were ſuppoſed to have had their full effect:

and yet in fact, an univerſal ſubmiſſion of all thoſe, who were witneſſes of the ſigns and wonders that accompanied the publication of the goſpel, did not follow. The learned men among the Jews, the ſcribes, the phariſees, the rulers of the people, were perſecutors of chriſtianity, not converts to it: and the vulgar, as well as they, were ſo far from believing JESUS to be the Meſſiah their nation expected, or any divine perſon ſent by God, that when PILATE inclined to ſave him, inſtead of BARABBAS a notorious criminal, the whole crowd cried out, "Let his blood be on us and our children;" and inſiſted, with a ſort of mutinous zeal, on his execution.

WHAT are we to ſay now? The Jew will inſiſt that the miracles might be ſuch as they are reported to have been; but that if they were ſuch, they were wrought by the powers of magic, like thoſe of APOLLONIUS of Tyana; or by ſome ſecret charm, like that of the true pronunciation of the name that conſiſted of four letters, the famous tetragrammaton; and that his anceſtors had reaſon therefore to reject the proofs drawn from them, inſtead of believing that the God of truth had ſet his ſeal, as it were, to an impoſture. The infidel will inſiſt, that all theſe miracles were equivocal at beſt, ſuch as credulous ſuperſtitious perſons, and none elſe, believed, ſuch as were frequently and univerſally impoſed by the firſt fathers of the chriſtian

ſtian church, and as are ſo ſtill by their ſucceſſors, wherever ignorance or ſuperſtition abound. He will apply to miracles what BESSARION ſaid of ſaints, and bid us judge of the antient by the modern. Thus will theſe men account for the little ſucceſs which the goſpel had on the firſt publication of it: little, I mean, when compared with the authority of the preacher, whoſe divinity was ſufficiently manifeſted under the diſguiſe of humanity.

SECTION II.

BUT I aſk, what now will a good and reaſonable Chriſtian ſay? He will not alledge, I think, that the Jews were rejected, and the Gentiles called in: ſince his two antagoniſts would be ready to anſwer, that he ſet the effect in the place of the cauſe, and the cauſe of the effect, when he aſſumed that the Jews refuſed to believe in the miracles and goſpel of CHRIST becauſe they were rejected, inſtead of aſſuming that they were rejected becauſe of their unbelief. Would he follow the example that has been ſet on other occaſions? Would he reaſon from his notions, well or ill abſtracted, of order, and of the fitneſſes and unfitneſſes of things, to the conduct of God, call this reaſoning demonſtration, and when he found the phaenomena ſtand in oppoſition to it (as they would do evidently in the preſent caſe, ſince that univerſality of ſubmiſſion to the Son of God was not paid, which ought to

have been paid according to all our ideas of order and fitneſs) would he have recourſe to ſome bungling hypotheſis to reconcile them? If he took this method, it would happen to him as it has happened to divines very often; he would ſtrengthen the objection of the infidel, and not be able to ſolve it afterwards.

An end, to which the means are not proportioned, can never be the end of infinite wiſdom, ſeconded by infinite power. The means employed to eſtabliſh and maintain the goſpel have not been ſufficient to do it independently of reaſon, and by the mere force of authority, from the firſt publication of it. The end and deſign therefore of infinite wiſdom was not to ſubject human reaſon, how much ſoever it was in fact ſubjected by the firſt converts, to a revelation received implicitely, even on the authority of the Son of God himſelf, and much leſs on any other. Reaſon was made ſo neceſſary to judge of this revelation, even at the time it was given, that if we ſuppoſe ourſelves tranſported back to that time, and inquiring into the truth of this revelation on the very ſpot where it was made, we ſhall find that, far from being determined by authority in favor of it, our reaſon would have had much to do in comparing the various and contradictory teſtimonies, and in ballancing the degrees of probability that reſulted from them. The conteſt between the firſt witneſſes of chriſtian revelation, and the reſt of the Jews who witneſſ-

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ed againſt it, became a party conteſt, carried on with great zeal on the perſecuted ſide, and great cruelty on the other. They diſputed not only about the miracles that had been wrought, and were daily working among them, even about that deciſive concluding miracle the reſurrection of JESUS; but about the interpretation of their prophecies, which foretold the coming of the Meſſiah, and about the application of them to him. In ſuch a confuſed ſtate of things, on whoſe authority could any honeſt inquirer have depended? If he had weighed, or if he had counted ſuffrages, he would have been equally determined againſt the truth; and upon the whole he muſt have deſpaired of coming to a determination at all by any other way, than that of employing the utmoſt ſagacity of his mind, and judging for himſelf, unleſs it had pleaſed God to make him ſome particular revelation.

THIS advantage St. PAUL boaſted that he had. The miracles of CHRIST and of his diſciples made ſo little impreſſion on him, tho he had not only heard of them all, but had been an eye-witneſs, at leaſt, of that which appeared when St. STEPHEN was ſtoned to death, that he ſignaliſed his zeal againſt chriſtianity till he himſelf became the ſubject of a moſt miraculous operation, and was called upon by JESUS in a ſhort, but very pathetic expoſtulation *. In this manner he was converted; and in this manner

* Acts of the Apoſtles chap. ix.

every inhabitant of the earth, Jew or Gentile, learned or ignorant, might have been converted, as well as he. But it was not in the plan of providence to employ the immediate, particular, miraculous, and therefore irreſiſtible authority of revelation in many caſes: and all other authority, even that of miracles, occaſionally wrought before ſome, and reported by others, being inadequate to univerſal conviction, the generality of men were left to embrace chriſtianity or not, as their reaſon, right or wrong, weak or ſtrong, ſhould direct; and reaſon not being ſubdued by revelation, revelation was ſubjected to reaſon. St. Paul was not in this caſe; his reaſon had been ſubdued effectually: but he dealed with other men as being in it. He argued, he expoſtulated, he appealed to their reaſon principally. He worked indeed now and then a miracle, as it was given him to work them; for his caſe in this reſpect may be compared to that, which a divine of the faculty of Paris, whom I have quoted elſewhere, aſſumed to be the caſe of all thoſe who wrote the books of the Old teſtament. One ſeemed to have had inſpirations, and the others a power of working miracles occaſionally, not conſtantly. Paul, therefore, appealed chiefly to the reaſon of mankind in his ſeveral miſſions. On two of theſe miſſions, at leaſt, it may be to our preſent purpoſe to make ſome reflection.

He preached at Antioch to the Jews and to the

the Gentiles: the former contradicted him, diſputed with him, and raiſed a perſecution againſt him and his companion BARNABAS. The apoſtles worked no miracles on this occaſion, like men who knew how ineffectual the authority they procured was, for the moſt part, in the then ordinary exerciſe of that power. The laſt recourſe was to reaſon; and when that failed, the apoſtles turned themſelves from the loſt ſheep of the houſe of Iſrael to the Gentiles. The Gentiles were more docile, and free from the prejudices of the Jews about their prophecies, which only ſerved to miſlead them: reaſon had more effect on theſe; they rejoiced, they glorified the word of God, and they believed, that is, as many of them as were preordained to eternal life *; for it would ſeem by this paſſage, that neither authority, nor reaſon, nor miracles, nor all theſe together were ſufficient to make men proſelytes to chriſtianity without a previous deſignation, and divine election †. Let us follow

* Crediderunt quotquot erant praeordinati ad vitam aeternam. Act. c. xiii.

† N. B. The opinion that God acts with men by arbitrary will, and by virtue of his abſolute ſovereignty over his creatures, being once eſtabliſhed, and, in conſequence of it, the doctrines of election, reprobation, and an eternal predeſtination; much of what has been ſaid falls to the ground. Miracles were as ſuperfluous as reaſon, where ſpecial grace was to operate; and both inſignificant, where it was not to operate. I own myſelf unable to reconcile theſe apparent inconſiſtencies, and I leave that taſk to others.

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St. Paul from Antioch to Rome, where he ſucceeded a little better among the Jews. Thoſe of Aſia looked upon him as an apoſtate, and were the more averſe to chriſtianity, perhaps, for his preaching it. But the Jews at Rome had no prejudices againſt him, tho he was brought thither in chains. They had received no letters about him from Judaea; no one who came from thence had ſpoke any evil of him. They had heard indeed of a new ſect, which was every where oppoſed, and they were deſirous to know his opinion of it *. They took a day to hear him, and they heard him with remarkable patience, for they heard him from morning to night. He was full of the Holy Ghoſt, he argued from the law of Moses, from the prophets, and from every other topic, as we may aſſure ourſelves, and omitted nothing that might perſuade them to embrace the goſpel. What was the effect? Some believed, and ſome believed not. The ſame may be obſerved of his proceeding at Theſſalonica. He went into the ſynagogue, he worked no miracles, but he reaſoned with the Jews three ſabbath days, &c.

To conclude on this head then: it is plain that the firſt publiſhers of chriſtianity did not reſt the cauſe primarily, or ſolely, on authority of any kind. It is plain that they ſubmitted the goſpel, and the authority of thoſe who publiſhed it, to the examination of reaſon, as any other

* Acts ch. xxviii.

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ſyſtem even of divine philoſophy ought to be ſubmitted. The conſequence was, that it prevailed as other religions have done, and not with that univerſal aſſent which might have been expected from a religion given by God himſelf, and given to all the ſons of men; from a revelation, their belief in which was to decide their eternal happineſs or miſery, and which omnipotence could have impoſed as eaſily on all as on ſome, if infinite wiſdom had ſo deſigned. Right reaſon is always on the ſide of truth: it is truth, and can never differ from itſelf. But right and wrong reaſon, the bona and mala ratio of COTTA, being nothing elſe than the reſult of a right and wrong uſe of our faculties, it is no wonder, the imperfection of theſe faculties, and the prejudices and ſeductions to which we are expoſed, being conſidered, that the wrong takes often the place of the right, and paſſes for it. Why the natural order of things was preſerved thus far in the caſe of a ſupernatural diſpenſation, why ſo many particular miracles were wrought ineffectually to the general avowed deſign of this revelation, and why the divine authority of it was not manifeſted to all concerned in it, that is, to all mankind, as the divine authority of the law was manifeſted to all concerned in it, that is, to all the Iſraelites, let us not preſume to gueſs. In this manner chriſtianity was firſt promulgated; and in this manner, therefore, it was right and fit that chriſtianity ſhould be promulgated.

But now, ſince the prerogative of reaſon was thus eſtabliſhed over revelation originally, it is proper we ſhould inquire how far this prerogative extends now, and whether it be leſſened, or increaſed, by length of time. In order to this divines teach, that we muſt diſtinguiſh between the external and internal evidences of the truth and divinity of the chriſtian revelation: by which I mean the teſtimony brought to prove the fact, that this revelation was made by God; and the character of the doctrines contained in it, whether worthy or unworthy of a divine original. If they can eſtabliſh the fact ſufficiently, the ſecond attempt ſeems little neceſſary: but it is for the honor of chriſtianity to ſtand ſuch examinations, as every pretended revelation declines; and our divines themſelves exhort us ſo to examine; tho it muſt be confeſſed that, when the reſult of our examination is not ſtrictly conformable to the doctrines they teach, they damn us for examining; according to that abſurd prerogative which they exerciſe frequently of advancing general propoſitions, and of condemning them in particular inſtances. Let us not be ſo abſurd. He who examines in a manner to ſhew, that, whilſt he refuſes ſubmiſſion to the authority of man as if it was that of God, he is careful not to reject the authority of God as if it were that of man, does much more ſervice to chriſtianity, than he who reſolves all into authority, and builds his religion on his faith, inſtead of building his faith on his religion; that is, than he who aſſents to

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facts and doctrines, and a whole ſyſtem of religion implicitely, without an examination of any part of it, inſtead of believing things that he can neither comprehend, nor examine, on the foundation of thoſe which he comprehends, and has examined.

Of the two ſorts of evidence that have been mentioned, the external comes firſt under examination; for nothing can be more ridiculous than that which has happened very often to philoſophers and learned men, to examine the cauſes of things, to deſcant profoundly on their nature, and after that to find that the exiſtence of theſe things was doubtful, or the non-exiſtence certain. One of your divines would urge the authority of the church on this occaſion, as ſufficient to ſupply the want of any other proof; and to fill up the meaſure of probability, which he would call certainty. But he would urge it moſt abſurdly, ſince he would prove in a circle the authority of the church by that of the ſcriptures, and the authority of the ſcriptures by that of the church. One of our proteſtant divines, who unite in oppoſition to the authority of your church, and would be glad to erect an authority very like to it each in his own, would mince the matter a little, would rather inſinuate, than aſſert, ſuch an authority, and rather perſuade, than demand, ſubmiſſion to it. He would allow that, in the full latitude of evangelical liberty, you have a right to examine the teſtimony in favor

favor of chriſtianity: but he would attempt at the ſame time to ſhew you, that it is much more eaſy, and full as ſafe, to rely on the authority of ſo many pious, judicious, and learned men, as have made it the buſineſs of their lives to examine the teſtimonies of this revelation, and have agreed to affirm the validity of them.

NEITHER of theſe divines however would be ſo ridiculous, I think, as to deny that the external evidence of chriſtian revelation has been diminiſhed by time. They would own, that it has been ſo by the loſs of many proofs, whereof time and accidents have deprived us. But I am apt to ſuſpect that, if time and accidents had been more impartial, and had conveyed down to us all the proofs that were brought for it and againſt it, tho proofs would have been more abundant, the evidence would not have been greater, and we ſhould be puzzled as much by contradictory, as we are by ſcanty, proofs. We have indeed the concurrent teſtimony of the ſacred writers: and it has been aſked, whether we have not as much knowledge of them as we have of ſeveral profane writers whoſe hiſtories paſs for authentic? It has been ſaid too by ſome of thoſe who corrupt oftener, than they correct, the text of antient authors, that it is by a multitude of various readings, and of critical emendations, that theſe authors have been reſtored. But the compariſons are by no means juſt: for a different proof is neceſſary of the competency

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of authors, and a different aſſurance of the ſenſe of their writings according, to the different uſe that is made of the authority. We know that the memorials of men who had been captains in the army of ALEXANDER, and eye-witneſſes of all that paſſed in his famous expedition, were in ſome inſtances different and contradictory. We have reaſon to ſuſpect the veracity of CAESAR in ſome parts of his commentaries; and if we had the commentaries of LABIENUS, or thoſe of ASINIUS POLLIO, as we have the hiſtory of DION CASSIUS, we ſhould have ſtill more reaſon to ſuſpect, or we ſhould find more proofs, perhaps, of the errors. We read, however, the hiſtories of ARRIAN, and even of QUINTUS CURTIUS, tho we do not know who the latter was, and the commentaries of CAESAR, as authentic hiſtories. Such they are too, for all our purpoſes; and if paſſages which we deem genuine ſhould be ſpurious, if others ſhould be corrupted, or interpolated, and if the authors ſhould have purpoſely, or through deception, diſguiſed the truth, or advanced untruth, no great hurt would be done. But is this the caſe of the ſcriptures? In them, beſides all the other circumſtances neceſſary to conſtitute hiſtorical probability, it is not enough that the tenor of facts and doctrines be true; the leaſt error is of conſequence. There was a time when the eaſtern and weſtern churches had great diſputes about the proceſſion of the Holy Ghoſt; whether he proceeded from the Father and the Son, or from

from the Father by the Son. Theſe diſputes occaſioned much diſorder, tho the difference of a monoſyllable was alone concerned. But other diſputes had ariſen before theſe, laſted longer, and devaſted almoſt all chriſtendom by wars, perſecutions, and maſſacres, tho the ſole difference between the contending parties was about a ſingle letter. One ſide affirmed, and the nicean council decreed, that the Son was ὁμοούσιος, that is, conſubſtantial with the Father, "habens "ſimul eſſentiam, id eſt, eandem eſſentiam;" the Arians, moſt of them at leaſt, would have acknowledged him to be ὁμοιούσιος, that is, of ſimilar ſubſtance, "habens ſimilem eſſentiam;" but the holy council adhered, and the Arians were all damned for the difference of an iota. If the decrees of councils, therefore, and the ſeveral creeds that were made required ſo exact a preciſion of words and letters, and if the leaſt miſtake was of ſuch fatal conſequence, what muſt we think, what have we not reaſon to fear, concerning that text on which they have all pretended to be founded, and wherein it is ſaid, that there are thirty thouſand various readings? When we meet with any record cited in hiſtory, we accept the hiſtorical proof, and content ourſelves with it, of how many copies ſoever it may be the copy. But this proof would not be admitted in judicature, as Mr. Locke * obſerves, nor any thing leſs than an atteſted copy of the record. The application is obvious:

* Eſſay, lib. iv. c. 16.

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and if it be reaſonable to take ſuch a precaution in matters that concern private property, and wherein the ſum of ten pounds may not be at ſtake, how much more reaſonable is it to neglect no precaution, that can be taken, to aſſure ourſelves that we receive nothing for the word of God, which is not ſufficiently atteſted to be ſo? It may be ſaid, it has been ſaid by a very able writer, that "the ground of this proceeding in civil courts ſeems to be, that the "original record, or an atteſted copy, is capable of being produced; and that therefore "to offer any diſtant proof might look as if "ſome art were intended to corrupt matters, and "to diſguiſe the truth." After this he aſks, "is it in the nature of things as poſſible and "eaſy to produce the originals or atteſted "copies of the ſcriptures—as it is to do ſo "in matters which come before a civil court?" The evaſion is not even plauſible. The copy of a copy is not refuſed in proof, ſolely becauſe the original or atteſted copy may be had; for this is not always the caſe: but becauſe the proof would be too diſtant, whether they can be had or no. The two caſes therefore are not vaſtly, as this writer affirms, nor at all different. If the rule may be thought reaſonable in the one, it cannot be thought, without abſurdity, unreaſonable in the other. However it happens, the want of an original, or of an atteſted, copy is a want of proof: and the learned divine will be forced, if he is puſhed on this article, to confeſs this want of proof,

or to ſupply it, which he is too wiſe to attempt, by ſhewing that the ſcriptures we have are atteſted copies of the originals. I might carry this very far, if I would carry it as far as occaſion is given to carry it. But I will only ſay, that it would be much better to leave objections unanſwered, than to anſwer them no better; and that I pity a man of as good parts as Dr. CONYBEARE, who is obliged to ſuch drudgery. The authenticity of the ſcriptures has ſuffered much diminution by length of time, and by other ways: for which reaſon divines would do better perhaps, if they truſted more to grace and faith to ſupply this diminution, and leſs to their own ſkill in the eſtabliſhment of the external proofs of a traditional revelation; tho I know that theſe external proofs may be deemed to be in ſome ſort conditiones, ſine quibus non.

SECTION III.

BUT the prerogative of reaſon extends farther than the examination of witneſſes, and other external teſtimony. There is another ground of probability to be eſtabliſhed; and if this cannot be eſtabliſhed, the credit of a revelation will not ſupport itſelf on the other alone. This ground of probability is that which was mentioned at the ſame time with the former, and is called internal evidence. Divines ſound it high, and build much upon it; but their proceeding is, to my apprehenſion, alike abſurd and licentious.

A DIVINE, who has a large ſtock of theological preſumption, finds direct and evident proofs of a divine inſpiration in the very ſtyle of the ſcriptures; in the ſublimity of ſome parts, and in the ſimplicity of others; tho the ſame ſublimity, and the ſame ſimplicity, are to be found in uncanonical writings, and even in thoſe of eaſtern nations that are not chriſtian. He reaſons magiſterially, as if he was thoroughly acquainted not only with the human, but with the divine, nature; as if his underſtanding bore ſo near a proportion to the wiſdom of God, that he could diſcover it latent in the deepeſt myſteries; or under the veil of things ſeemingly ſo indifferent, or ſo common, that men of leſs ſagacity would not ſuſpect even human wiſdom to have been employed about them; and finally, as if his extended genius was able to comprehend a whole economy of divine wiſdom from ADAM down to CHRIST, nay even to the conſummation of things; to connect all the diſpenſations, and to ſhew the ſufficient reaſon of providence in every particular inſtance on the ſame plan. This now is madneſs, or ſomething worſe than madneſs: and yet men are ſo accuſtomed to reaſon in this method, and on theſe principles, that not only the learned and ingenious, who have ſome pretence to be ſo mad, purſue them; but every dabler in theology, who has no ſuch pretence, and muſt paſs for a fool or a knave whenever he grows extra-

vagant, affects to reaſon in the ſame manner when he writes, or when he preaches, and talks as impertinently in the pulpit of the deſigns of God, and of the conduct of providence, as he talks of the political deſigns and conduct of his governors in the coffee-houſe. Thus the bible becomes a canvas, on which it has been the buſineſs of many to dawb, from the time when it was firſt ſpread before them. If it was agreed, that ſome out-lines may have been traced by the original painter; yet would it be manifeſt, that ſeveral particular figures, and the compoſition of the whole ſyſtem, is the work of bungling human pencils.

From a motley ſyſtem thus framed the pretended internal evidences of divine revelation are drawn; and they are often drawn in ſuch a manner, that he who might yield to external proofs is ſhocked at theſe, inſtead of being confirmed by them. How ſhould it be otherwiſe, when theſe proofs are not brought even as they are found in this motley ſyſtem; and when they take the appearance, for they have often no more, of proofs, not from the plain text and tenor of the ſcriptures, but from the amplifications and conjectures of divines? Theſe amplifications and conjectures take away the force of the proof, ſuch as it is, by ſhewing too viſibly that they are amplifications and conjectures: for it is not lawful to proceed in caſes where divine, as in thoſe where human, knowledge, wiſdom, and authority are

are alone concerned. In theſe, our endeavours to improve what we find are not only lawful, but laudable; and it is no more reaſonable that the authority of thoſe men, who have gone before us, ſhould fix the bounds of our inquiries, than it is that our authority ſhould fix thoſe of the men who are to come after us. Human ſcience would have been long ago at a ſtand, if a contrary practice had prevailed univerſally, as we ſee it is, and has long been, in thoſe particular countries where the contrary practice has ſo prevailed. But what is commendable in one caſe, is blameable in the other. We have no more right to add to the word of God, than we have to alter it: and the ſame revelation which gives us divine knowledge, in what proportion ſoever it be given, and how little ſoever it may ſatisfy our curioſity and our imaginary want, confines it likewiſe. The human maſter may tell us all he knows; and we may carry knowledge much farther on his inſtructions, and on our own ſtrength. But the divine maſter tells us no more than he judges it fit we ſhould know; and every ſtep we attempt to make beyond his expreſs revelation, and on our own ſtrength, is a ſtep we make in the dark, expoſed to err, and ſure not to know.

THO I think that the internal evidences of a divine revelation neither are, nor can be, ſuch poſitive proofs as they are pretended to be; yet am I fully perſuaded that reaſon ought to examine the inward character of a revelation, as

well as the outward teſtimony. Negative proof will ſupply the want of poſitive proof: and thus a ſure and a real criterion will be found, inſtead of one that is equivocal at beſt, and imaginary. I will not perplex the argument by conſidering how far a conformity to the general experience of mankind is to be exacted in an hiſtory that relates principally to ſupernatural events; but I may inſiſt that there is another conformity, a conformity to all we know of the Supreme Being, and of the law of our nature, ſo very eſſential to a revelation that pretends to come from God, that if any one thing repugnant to this knowledge be found in any hiſtory, or ſyſtem of doctrine, they ought to be rejected, whatever proofs external or internal they may boaſt of a divine original. Tho we hold no very exalted rank among the intellectual creatures of God, yet has he been pleaſed to give us faculties by which we are able, in uſing them well, to demonſtrate all that he has judged neceſſary for us to know in our natural ſtate, and without ſupernatural aſſiſtance, concerning his exiſtence, his nature and attributes, his providence over his creatures, and their duties to him and to one another. We ought to acknowledge, with the utmoſt gratitude, the advantage of ſuch a rank in the order of beings: and ſhall we dare to aſſume for true any facts, or any doctrines, that are evidently inconſiſtent with this knowledge, however even good men may endeavour to reconcile in opinion, by frivolous diſcourſe, things that are irreconcileable

concileable in nature, or whatever authority be employed to impoſe them? God forbid that we ſhould. Right reaſon will never adviſe us to do ſo, and if any pretended revelation required that we ſhould, it would prove itſelf to be falſe, for that very reaſon.

NATURAL revelation, ſo I will call it, produces knowledge, a ſeries of ſenſitive and intuitive knowledge from the firſt principles to the laſt concluſions. The ſyſtem of things that are, that is, the phaenomena of nature, are the firſt principles; and reaſon, that is, a real divine illumination, leads us from one neceſſary truth to another through the whole courſe of theſe demonſtrations. In all theſe caſes we know; we do not believe. But in the caſe of ſupernatural revelation, when it is traditional, we can have nothing more than opinion, ſupported by human authority, and by decreaſing probability afterwards. The divine authority grows leſs and leſs apparent, whilſt the obligation of ſubmiſſion to it is reputed ſtill the ſame. But the certainty of natural revelation ſuffers no diminution; it is always original, and equally capable of forcing our aſſent in all times and places, becauſe the principles by which it is manifeſted are equally objects of human ſenſe and intellect, in all times and places. The miſſionary of ſupernatural religion appeals to the teſtimony of men he never knew, and of whom the infidel he labors to convert never heard, for the truth of theſe extraor-

dinary events which prove the revelation he preaches: and it is ſaid that this objection was made at firſt to AUSTIN the monk by ETHELRED the ſaxon king. But the miſſionary of natural religion can appeal at all times, and every where, to preſent and immediate evidence, to the teſtimony of ſenſe and intellect, for the truth of thoſe miracles which he brings in proof: the conſtitution of the mundane ſyſtem being in a very proper ſenſe an aggregate of miracles.

UPON the whole, let us ſuppoſe the hiſtorical and traditional authority, urged in proof of a revelation, to be carried as high as the nature of things will admit, on a concurrence of all the conditions neceſſary to eſtabliſh ſuch a probability, as ought to ſtand in lieu of certainty, in every other caſe, and as may induce us, in this caſe, to believe even in inſtances that are not at all conformable to general experience; yet muſt we not receive it for true till we are ſure, on the moſt careful examination and analyſis, that it contains nothing unworthy of the majeſty of the Supreme Being, nothing inconſiſtent with the demonſtrated truths of natural religion. Profane hiſtory may contain ſuch things as are not conformable to general experience, and be nevertheleſs credible in all other reſpects. But ſacred hiſtory, the hiſtory of a divine revelation, that contains any one thing unworthy of the Supreme Being, or repugnant to the religion of nature, and to the moſt evident dictates of reaſon, ought

to be rejected with indignation, and will be ſo by every man who is afraid to blaſpheme. There are many occaſions on which we cannot diſcover the whole truth, and on which however we are very able to diſcern what implies contradiction with ſome ſelf-evident, or demonſtrated truth. This may be one of thoſe: and on this we ſhall be ſure not to err, if we perſuade ourſelves that the ſame God, who gave us reaſon to arrive at certainty in ſome caſes, and at probability in various degrees in others, never deſigned that we ſhould oppoſe probability, in any caſe, to certainty, nor believe againſt knowledge. Dr. BARROW, in a diſcourſe concerning the virtue and reaſonableneſs of faith, after begging the queſtion long, and talking in a theological cant more worthy of PAUL than of a man like him, as he was bound by his profeſſion to do, talks like a philoſopher, and a man of ſuperior ſenſe. He ſays, that "if we ſeriouſly weigh the caſe, "we ſhall find that to require faith without "reaſon is to demand an impoſſibility; and "that God therefore neither doth, nor can en-"join us faith without reaſon." Now I aſk, if we are not obliged to believe without reaſon, can we be obliged to believe againſt it? He ſays, "that no man can believe he knoweth not "what nor why;" and therefore that he, who "truly believeth, muſt apprehend the pro-"poſition, and muſt diſcern it's connection with "ſome principle of truth, which, as more no-"torious to him, he before doth admit." Now

let

let me aſk again, can any man be ſaid to apprehend a propoſition which contains a myſtery, that is, ſomething unintelligible; or any thing more than the ſound of the words? Will not the argument againſt believing become ſtill ſtronger, if a propoſition is repugnant to any principles of truth, which we have before admitted on evident demonſtration? I am proud to have doctor BARROW on my ſide; and will therefore conclude, as he does, that the man, who pretends to believe otherwiſe, "doth only pretend to believe out "of ſome deſign, or from affection to ſome "party: his faith is not ſo much really faith as "hypocriſy, craft, fondneſs, or faction.

THIS being premiſed, let us own that when a revelation has paſſed ſucceſsfully through theſe trials, when it has all the authenticity of human teſtimony, when it appears conſiſtent in all it's parts, and when it contains nothing inconſiſtent with any real knowledge which we have of the ſupreme all-perfect Being, and of natural religion, ſuch a revelation is to be received with the moſt profound reverence, the moſt intire ſubmiſſion, and the moſt unfeigned thankſgiving. Reaſon has exerciſed her whole prerogative then, and delivers us over to faith. To believe before all theſe trials, or to doubt after them, is alike unreaſonable: for nothing can be more abſurd and contemptible, than what St. AUSTIN ſomewhere or other, for in his works I have read it, advances about believing firſt, in hopes of underſtanding

derſtanding afterwards; which is a propoſition much like that which CALVIN *, as abſurd and as dogmatical a father as AUSTIN, maintains, when he makes the authority of the ſcriptures to depend on the inward teſtimony of the Spirit alone; and then mentions the proofs proper to eſtabliſh the authenticity and divinity of theſe books, as props, "adminicula," that may help to ſupport the faith they could not have raiſed.

SECTION IV.

IF ſuch abſurdities as theſe have induced ſome to ridicule all religions that aſſume themſelves founded on divine revelation, there are thoſe who take occaſion from the effects of them to form objections of a graver kind, and of greater conſequence. Theſe men would have it believed, that all ſuch religions are incompatible with civil ſovereignty; becauſe they introduce a private conſcience that may be, and often is, contrary to the public conſcience of the ſtate; and not only ſet up private judgment in oppoſition to that of the legiſlature, but inforce the dictates of it by a greater authority, even by that of God himſelf. The Jews were unſociable members of the great commonwealth of mankind: and the ſame private conſcience, which determined them to the exerciſe of every kind of cruelty on other nations and other religions, made them rebels to government, even to their own, upon ſome oc-

* Vid. CALVIN's Inſtitutes, lib. i. c. 8.

caſions, and frequently perſecutors and aſſaſſins of one another. They thought themſelves authoriſed by their religion to commit ſuch barbarities as even they perhaps, if they had had no religion, would not have committed; and zeal for it, that is, private conſcience, inſpired a ſanguinary rage that might be called, very juſtly, religious madneſs. To ſubdue thoſe, and reduce them to a ſtate of ſervitude, who do not receive the Koran, is a firſt principle that made innumerable countries the ſcenes of ſlaughter and miſery. MAHOMET, who taught it, practiſed it; and his ſucceſſors have exerciſed the ſame violence as far as they have been able to carry their arms. But this violence is not confined to thoſe whom they call infidels; for the ſects of Omar and Aly deteſt each other as much as they both do chriſtianity: and the doctors of Mecca gave as good a bull to MIRIWEIS to ſatisfy private conſciences in taking arms againſt the ſophy, as any pope ever gave to juſtify rebellion, and the depoſition of a lawful prince*.

BUT to leave judaiſm and mahometiſm, and to ſpeak of the chriſtian religion, againſt which the objection is particularly directed, and which I mean particularly to defend: it muſt be confeſſed, that from the time it made any figure in

* N. B. A manuſcript in the king of France's library, writ at the time, and on the ſpot, gives an account of a journey which MIRIWEIS made to Mecca for this purpoſe, before he invaded Perſia and dethroned the ſophy.

the world, it appeared divided into ſects that even heathen perſecution could not unite; and that from the time it became an eſtabliſhed religion, it deluged the world with blood, at the ſuggeſtion, as well as under the pretence, of private conſcience. Whatever ſect prevailed, by eccleſiaſtical cabals, or by court intrigues, out of which the ladies * were not always excluded, that ſect dictated one public conſcience in the religion of the ſtate. Another ſect, that prevailed at another time, or in another place, by much the ſame means, dictated another: and of this we need no other proof than the ſeveral revolutions from athanaſianiſm to arianiſm, and from arianiſm to athanaſianiſm. One alone could prevail at once: and as there were many, there was always a reſiſtance of private to public conſcience more or leſs open, and which broke out in mutiny or rebellion on one ſide, and in maſſacres and perſecutions on the other, very frequently. How it happened I know not. Let divines tell that, or rather let us forbear to pry over curiouſly into the ſecret diſpoſitions of providence. But ſo it has happened, that the chriſtian religion has been attended by the ſame courſe of accidents as are common with it to every inſtitution purely human. The beſt of theſe anſwer their end in part only from the firſt, and whilſt

* If Irene had a determining influence over the fathers of the ſecond nicean council, there is room to think that another theological princeſs took part with Eusebius of Nicomedia in the firſt.

the

the impreſſion of the force, that ſet them a going, laſts; and never fail to ſlacken afterwards, or to take new impreſſions from contingent events, by which they degenerate, and become inſenſibly new inſtitutions under old names. A man who denies this, or who does not confeſs like CHARRON *, that, "after all, nothing ſhews more "than religion the weakneſs of humanity," is too ignorant, or too diſingenuous, to deſerve an anſwer. But as government is not to be baniſhed out of ſociety, and anarchy to be introduced; becauſe government, inſtead of ſecuring the peace, and procuring the happineſs of ſtates, is often the cauſe of all their diſorders, and of their final ſubverſion: ſo neither is religion to be baniſhed out of government, becauſe inſtead of ſtrengthening and ſupporting, it ſerves often to weaken and to diſſolve, thoſe that are the moſt firmly eſtabliſhed.

WHAT is here ſaid of religion in general, is eminently true of chriſtianity in particular. Tho this religion was born, if I may ſay ſo, in a deſert, and educated by a ſect of the moſt obſcure people in the roman empire; and tho it ſeemed calculated in many inſtances to be rather the inſtitution of an order of reformers, than of a national governing religion; yet no religion ever appeared in the world, whoſe natural tendency was ſo much directed to promote the peace and happineſs of mankind. If it has had a contrary effect,

* De la ſageſſe.

it

it has had it apparently, not really. Theology is in fault, not religion. Theology is a ſcience that may be compared juſtly to the box of PANDORA. Many good things lie uppermoſt in it; but many evil lie under them, and ſcatter plagues and deſolation through the world. If we cannot ſhut the box, it is of uſe, however, to know that the box is open; and to be convinced the more of this truth, let us make a general analyſe of chriſtianity; and then obſerve, as generally, the riſe, progreſs, and effects of theology.

SECTION V.

IN the firſt place then, chriſtianity is founded on the univerſal law of nature. I will not ſay that chriſtianity is a republication of it. But I will ſay that the goſpel teaches the great and fundamental principle of this law, univerſal benevolence; recommends the precepts of it, and commands the obſervation of them in particular inſtances occaſionally, always ſuppoſes them, always enforces them, and makes the law of right reaſon a law, in every poſſible definition of the word, beyond all cavil. I ſay beyond all cavil, becauſe a great deal of ſilly cavil has been employed to perplex the plaineſt thing in nature, and the beſt determined ſignification of words according to the different occaſions on which they are uſed.

I SHALL attempt perhaps, at ſome other time,

to expoſe more fully the ſolemn trifling that has been employed on this ſubject, if what will be here ſaid ſhould not be thought ſufficient, as I believe it ought to be.

WITHOUT entering therefore into metaphyſical and logical refinements, concerning fitneſſes and unfitneſſes, reſulting from the ſuppoſed eternal relations of things, which determine, according to ſome writers, the will of God himſelf; without amuſing ourſelves to diſtinguiſh beetwen natural differences that ariſe in this manner, and moral differences that are ſaid to ariſe from will alone; let us obſerve, that not only ſelf-preſervation, but a deſire to be happy, are the immediate or improved effects of a natural inſtinct, the firſt in the whole animal kind; the laſt in the human ſpecies at leaſt. As ſoon as men's appetites and paſſions are awake, they are determined by theſe to indulge every agreeable, and to abhor every diſagreeable, ſenſation: for pleaſure, which is temporary, and therefore not real, happineſs, paſſes for it, and is alone the object of appetite and paſſion. But as ſoon as their reaſon is formed, they diſcover the momentous difference between pleaſure and happineſs. Experience and reflection bring them acquainted with the ſyſtem in which they are placed, and with the eſſential, I do not ſay eternal, differences of things according to the conſtitution of it; by which ſome tend to their pleaſure, ſome to their happineſs, ſome to both, and ſome to neither; or to the very contrary, to

pain

pain and miſery. By theſe conſequences they diſtinguiſh natures: and on theſe eſſential differences reaſon eſtabliſhes the principles neceſſary to promote and ſecure the human happineſs of every individual in the happineſs of ſociety. Theſe principles are called, very properly, the laws of nature; becauſe, altho it be true that the Supreme Being willed into exiſtence this ſyſtem, as he did every other, and by conſequence all the relations of things contained in it, yet it is not this will that impoſes, in a ſtate of nature, and among men who have no knowledge perhaps of their creator; it is in truth the conſtitution of the ſyſtem alone that impoſes, theſe laws on mankind originally; whatever power made the ſyſtem, or ſuppoſing it to have been never made: and when they are thus impoſed, they determine the will of our ſpecies as effectually, and oblige as ſtrongly, as the moſt powerful principle of human nature can determine and oblige human creatures.

I DO not ſay that they have their effect abſolutely, nor conſtantly. Appetite, paſſion, and the force of immediate objects, are often too hard for reaſon, even among thoſe who hearken the moſt to her voice: and no wonder they ſhould be ſo ſince they are too hard for revelation. If the law of nature, collected by human reaſon from the eſſential differences of things, cannot procure a perfect obedience from thoſe who profeſs themſelves ſubject to it, without the aſſiſtance

of civil laws, and political inſtitutions, nor even with this aſſiſtance; ſo may we ſee, even in every chriſtian country, that the will of God, declared in his works, and in his word, cannot determine the rebellious will of man to conform to it in any near degree, even where it is enforced by the terrors of preſent, as well as future puniſhments, that are held out to the tranſgreſſors of it. If we conſider effects, the law of nature is as much a law as the law of the goſpel, and creates as really an obligation in choice to prefer good to evil. If we conſider original inſtitution and authority, it will not indeed correſpond in the mind of a ſtratonic philoſopher with his notion of an human law impoſed by will; but he will be under no neceſſity of applying that notion to it. He may think, and call it, a law impoſed on him by the operations of a ſuperior, tho unintelligent, power; the courſe of which he cannot alter, and muſt therefore conform himſelf to it in order to be happy: and ſomething of this kind even GROTIUS * was forced to allow, a little unwillingly, when he ſaid —— "et haec "quidem —— locum aliquem haberent etiamſi "daremus —— non eſſe Deum." The morality of actions does not, I think, conſiſt in this, that they are preſcribed by will, even the will of God; but in this, that they are the means, however impoſed the practice of them may be, of acquiring happineſs agreeable to our nature. Morality regards manners and the conduct of

* De jure belli et pacis, Proleg. 2.

human

human life: and therefore I ſee as little reaſon to deny that atheiſts may have knowledge of the morality of actions, as I do to deny that the practice of this morality is enjoined by a law in the ſenſe of obliging and binding; for if it ſhould be ſaid that it cannot paſs for a law in this ſenſe, becauſe every man's own reaſon impoſes it on him, and he cannot be at once the obliger and the obliged, the binder and the bound, I ſhould think the ſophiſm ſcarce worthy of an anſwer; or ſhould content myſelf to inform the ſophiſter, that there may be obligation without a law by will, and a law by will without obligation; and then leave him to ponder on the matter.

But now, tho the law of nature be a law in a ſtrict and proper ſenſe, and as really promulgated by God in his works as it would have been in his word if he had ſpoke to his creatures, how much wrangling ſoever may be made by men, who frame and change definitions juſt as their different purpoſes require; yet is this law more completely and more effectually ſuch to a theiſt, than to an atheiſt: and Mr. Bayle's famous paradox can never be received for truth by common ſenſe, nor by good policy. The ſame uſe of ſenſe and reaſon ſhews to both the conſtitution of nature, the eſſential differences of things, and the obligations that have the force of laws derived from thence. But the former riſes from a knowledge of the phaenomena to a knowledge of the God of nature, and in the

law he diſcovers the lawgiver. The atheiſt ſees it is his intereſt, the theiſt ſees it is his duty, to obſerve this law; and he adores the divine wiſdom and goodneſs that have blended together ſo marvellouſly, and ſo graciouſly, his greateſt intereſt and his greateſt duty. Every kind of knowledge, whereof our nature is capable, combines to ſhew the theiſt that God ſpeaks to man in his works, and ſignifies his will by them. He can neither be in doubt whether it is God who ſpeaks, nor be at a loſs to underſtand the divine language. An atheiſt who has much imagination, much elevation of mind, and a great warmth of inward ſentiment, may, perhaps, contemplate the differences of things in abſtract conſideration, and contraſt the beauty of virtue and the deformity of vice till he falls in love, if I may uſe the expreſſion after TULLY, with the former, and grows to abhor every appearance of the latter. He may create, in this manner, in himſelf, as it were, an artificial moral ſenſe; for to aſſume any ſuch natural inſtinct is as abſurd as to aſſume innate ideas, or any other of the platonic whimſies. But how much more lively muſt this ſenſe be in the theiſt, who knows not only that virtue is the perfection of his nature, but that he conforms himſelf by the practice of it to the deſigns of infinite wiſdom, and co-operates in ſome ſort with the Almighty?

As a knowledge of the eſſential differences of things may lead men, who know not God, to a

knowledge of the morality of actions; ſo do theſe eſſential differences ſerve as ſo many clues by which the theiſt may guide himſelf, through all the intricacies of error and of diſputation, to a knowledge of the will of God. Since infinite wiſdom, that muſt always proportion means to ends, has made happineſs the end or inſtinctive object of all his human creatures; and has ſo conſtituted them, and the ſyſtem in which he has placed them, that they can neither attain to this happineſs, nor be ſecure in the poſſeſſion of it by any other means than the practice of morality, or the ſocial virtues; it is demonſtrated that God wills we ſhould purſue theſe means to arrive at this end. We know more certainly the will of God in this way, than we can know it in any other. We may take the word of man for the word of God, and in fact this has been, and is ſtill, the caſe of many. But we can never miſtake the works of God for the works of men; and may be therefore aſſured that a revelation, evidently manifeſted in them, is a divine revelation. But tho natural religion is an object of knowledge, and all other religions, even that of the goſpel, can reſt on nothing more than probability, yet may that probability be ſuch, as will and ought to force our aſſent. He therefore, who thinks that the chriſtian religion is founded on ſuch a probability, may affirm that the goſpel, tho he does not think it in propriety of ſpeech a republication, is a confirmation, of

the law of nature, and renders this a law beyond all cavil about the term.

Sanctions of this law are implied in the theiſtical ſyſtem; becauſe it aſſumes, and to be ſure very juſtly, that the general happineſs, or miſery, of mankind depends on the obſervation of this law; and that the degrees of one and the other bear always a proportion to the exerciſe, and to the neglect, of public and private virtue in every community. But theſe motives are ſuch as particular men will be apt to think do not immediately, nor directly, concern them, becauſe they are apt to conſider themſelves as individuals, rather than as members of ſociety, and to catch at pleaſure without any regard to happineſs. To give an additional ſtrength, therefore, to theſe motives, that are determining in their own nature, but not ſo according to the imperfection of ours; deciſive to our reaſon, but not ſo to our appetites and paſſions, the antient theiſts and polytheiſts, philoſophers or legiſlators, invented another; that, I mean, of future rewards and puniſhments repreſented under various forms, but always directed to the ſame purpoſe. This motive every man, who believes it, may, and muſt, apply to himſelf, and hope the reward, and fear the puniſhment, for his ſecret as well as public actions; nay for his thoughts as well as his actions. What effect this motive had in remote antiquity we cannot ſay: but it had loſt it's force long before the inſtitution of chriſtianity.

The

The fear of hell particularly was ridiculed by ſome of the greateſt moraliſts: and to ſhew how little it was kept up in the minds of the vulgar, we may obſerve that TULLY * treated it in ſome of his public pleadings as he would have avoided ſcrupulouſly to do, whatever he thought of it himſelf, if this fear had been at that time prevalent even among the vulgar.

THO future rewards and puniſhments are not original nor direct ſanctions of the law of nature, becauſe not coeval with it; yet they became ſuch when the chriſtian revelation was made. They are original ſanctions of chriſtianity: and chriſtianity, which includes, was deſigned to enforce, the law of nature. We may, therefore, be allowed to wonder, and to ſeek the reaſon, why the law of nature, thus enforced, has ſerved ſo little to correct the manners of men, and to promote the peace and happineſs of the world: why chriſtianity has ſerved, on the contrary, to determine men to violate the very law it con-

*——quid tandem illi mali mors attulit? niſi forte ineptiis et fabulis ducimur, ut exiſtimemus apud inferos impiorum ſupplicia perferre.——actum eſſe praecipitem in ſceleratorum ſedem atque regionem. Quae ſi falſa ſunt, id quod omnes intelligunt; quid ei tandem aliud mors eripuit, praeter ſenſum doloris? Pro CLUENTIO.

Ut aliqua in vita formido improbis eſſet poſita, apud inferos ejuſmodi quaedam illi antiqui ſupplicia impiis conſtituta eſſe voluerunt: quod videlicet intelligebant, his remotis, non eſſe mortem ipſam pertimeſcendam. Orat. iv. in CATILIN.

firms, and has opened a new ſource of miſchief wherever it has prevailed. I ſaid above that theology is in fault, not religion. We ſhall ſee this verified in every part of the analyſe we make of chriſtianity. A few reflections will ſhew it to be ſo in this part, where we conſider the goſpel as a ſyſtem of natural religion.

SECTION VI.

THE law of nature, then, or natural religion, as it is the moſt important, is the plaineſt of all laws; and if the heavens do not declare the will, as well as the glory of God, according to an obſervation my lord BACON * makes in a chapter that contains ſome of the idols of the den, and of the theatre particularly; ſure I am that the earth, and the inhabitants of it, declare both. The will of God has been revealed in his works to all thoſe who have applied themſelves to the contemplation of them, even to thoſe who did not diſcover him in them, from the time that men have uſed their reaſon: and where reaſon improved, and knowledge increaſed, morality was carried as high in ſpeculation, and in practice too, by ſome of the heathen worthies, as by any of the chriſtian ſaints; even as high as the very precept which the chancellor † quotes, and

* De aug. ſcien. lib. ix. cap. 1.

† Diligite inimicos; benefacite his qui oderunt vos—— quae certe verba plauſum illum merentur, Nec vox hominem

and which he declares, a little raſhly, to be more than human, and above the light of nature, ſince it was taught by ſome who had no other light. Notwithſtanding this, divines, who cannot bear that the will, any more than the exiſtence, of God ſhould be deduced from his works, the cleareſt and the moſt authentic of all revelations, affirm againſt fact and reaſon both, that men may have indeed ſome true notions of virtue and vice, and of good and evil, by the light of nature, but that the moral law is too ſublime for reaſon to attain to every part of it: and on this affirmation a great deal of theological policy has been eſtabliſhed. Thus they give too another inſtance of their inconſiſtency: for nothing is more common than to find in their writings, nay in the courſe of the ſame argument, the religion of nature extolled as a perfect, and vilified as a moſt imperfect, ſyſtem. Had theſe reverend perſons been content to teach the duties of natural religion with evangelical ſimplicity, as CHRIST himſelf did in his ſermon on the mount and elſewhere, they might have taught additional duties, and theological virtues, apart; and they might have enforced the whole, if they had pleaſed, by the heaven they promiſed, and by the hell they threatened.

THUS they might have preſerved natural religion in the genuine purity of it. Inſtead of per-

nem ſonat; ſi quidem vox eſt, quae lumen naturae ſuperat. ib.

plexing

plexing and corrupting it, they might have enabled every one to be his own caſuiſt, and have made good men as well as Chriſtians. But this method, which would have enlarged the kingdom of God, would not have enlarged, nor fortified, the theological empire. To do this the more effectually, it was neceſſary to maintain the inſufficiency of human reaſon, tho God thought it ſo ſufficient, that he left the whole race of mankind, a few patriarchs and the choſen ſeed excepted, ſeveral thouſand years under no other conduct. It was neceſſary to boaſt the neceſſity of a revelation that might ſupply the defects of reaſon, tho this revelation remains, and has remained, from the time it was made, unknown to the far greateſt part of mankind. It was neceſſary to make even the moral law a myſtery, and ſuch a myſtery as could not be, on many occaſions, unveiled without a profound knowledge of theology; which is a ſcience that their order has imagined, and has reſerved to itſelf. In this reſpect, the chriſtian prieſthood has been wiſer than the heathen. The heathen prieſts were wholly employed in teaching ſilly ceremonies, and celebrating the pompous rites of ſuperſtitious worſhip. They left the care of teaching the principles, and inculcating the obligations, of morality to philoſophers; at leaſt in the times, with which we are beſt acquainted, this was the ſtate of religion among the pagans. But from the moſt early days of chriſtianity it has not been thus in the chriſtian church. The perſons,

whom

whom we repute commiſſioned to inſtruct others in revealed religion, have aſſumed the ſole right of deciding in all caſes concerning natural religion, that is, in almoſt all the moſt important affairs of public and private life.

By theſe means, and by theſe men, the moral law has been ſo intermixed with theology, and both of them have been ſo extended, and ſo perplexed, that the two plaineſt things in the world, and which would not have been fitted to the purpoſe of them, nor by conſequence worthy of their author, if they had not been plain, the law of nature, and the law of grace, have been rendered voluminous, intricate, and contentious to ſuch a degree, that the life of man is ſcarce long enough to attain a knowledge of them. Divines, who are ſuppoſed to have this knowledge, are therefore conſulted like oracles; and till their deciſions, like thoſe of the others, and for ſome of the ſame reaſons, began to loſe their credit, their authority in the direction of private conſcience was abſolute, and extended from the prince to the peaſant, who were alike under their influence. When they had decoyed mankind out of the plain into a wood, they who had planted the wood were neceſſary guides in it. Much ill uſe has been made of this authority, and much color given by it to the objection againſt religion, which we conſider here: ſo much, that I apprehend there is no way to do right to chriſtianity, but that of imputing, as we

we do, conſequences, that cannot be denied, to the corruption of religion by theology. This corruption has gone ſo far, that altho it be of the laſt abſurdity to affirm that any law can alter, much leſs contradict, that of nature, yet have men preſumed to diſpenſe with the obſervation of this law, to diſtinguiſh it away, to decide in direct oppoſition to it, and ſhameleſly to advance that the biſhop of your church, for inſtance, has a power to alter the very nature of things. "Jure poteſt contra jus decernere." Nay, BELLARMIN preſumed to ſay, that if a pope ſhould enjoin vices and forbid virtues, the chriſtian church would be obliged to believe vices good and virtues evil, or would ſin againſt conſcience. "Niſi vellet contra conſcientiam "peccare *."

MORAL theology, which contains a ſuper-ethical doctrine, as ſome grave divines have ridiculouſly called it, rendered the ſyſtem of ethics in the writings of the antient fathers, and doctors of the chriſtian church, more confuſed, leſs conſiſtent, and often leſs moral, than we find it eſtabliſhed in thoſe of the heathen; altho no ſyſtem can be more ſimple and plain than this of natural religion as it ſtands in the goſpel. I do not pretend to criticiſe the Offices of St. AMBROSE, tho he was a ſaint not very unlike our BECKET; but I will ſuppoſe that no man preſumes to compare them in any reſpect to thoſe of TULLY: and I

* BELLARM. De pont.

will

will advance that TULLY would have bluſhed to own ſome of the moral doctrines of St. AUSTIN, tho St. AUSTIN was, after St. PAUL, the great author of theological ſyſtems. This abuſe of reaſon, and of revelation both, was never puſhed ſo extravagantly, however, as it was by the ſchool divines. Theſe men, who ſat ruminating in their cells on the very little they knew by experience and obſervation, and whoſe minds, therefore, were void of the true materials of knowledge, worked up, in place of them, all the entia rationis, all the chimeras of imagination that have no ſubſiſtence out of it, and paſs under the name of metaphyſics; all the uſeleſs definitions, frivolous diſtinctions, vain ſubtilties, and captious argumentations of logic. By them caſuiſtry came into vogue, which has been called in French "l'art de chicaner avec Dieu:" as logic has been called "l'art de chicaner avec les hommes;" and we may call the whole tribe, as BUCHANAN called the ſcotch and iriſh ſcholaſtics particularly,

Gens ratione furens, et mentem paſta chimaeris.

Some divines have made men enthuſiaſts by ſtraining the obligations of natural and revealed religion both ſo high, that they become almoſt inconceivable, and quite impracticable. Others again, ſcholaſtic divines and caſuiſts eſpecially, have ſo relaxed all theſe, and taught men ſo many ways of compounding, as it were, with God, that they are left at liberty, on many occaſions,

caſions, to indulge the exceſs of their paſſions. According to the firſt, a good Chriſtian is an ideal man that never exiſted out of idea, as much as the ſage of the Stoics. According to the laſt, the worſt of men may be good Chriſtians on earth, and ſaints in heaven. In ſhort, they have divided the two laws that are intimately united in the goſpel, have ſet them in oppoſition, and have very often made the violations of one paſs for lawful means of promoting the other. The natural effect of religion is to help reaſon to ſubdue our paſſions; and of theology to help the paſſions to ſubdue reaſon and religion both, not only by indulgence to them, but by irritating the worſt and moſt furious of them. Hiſtory is full of ſuch examples; and irreligious perſons make uſe of them, unjuſtly, againſt chriſtianity.

SECTION VII.

THERE are two other parts, beſides this of natural religion, into which chriſtianity may be analyſed, and which have been corrupted alike by theology: duties ſuperadded to thoſe of the former; and articles of belief that reaſon neither could diſcover, nor can comprehend. As impracticable as ſome, and as incredible as others may ſeem, the duties required to be practiſed, and the propoſitions required to be believed, are conciſely and plainly enough expreſſed in the goſpel, in the original goſpel properly ſo called, which

which CHRIST taught, and which his four evangeliſts recorded. But they have been rendered, ſince they were firſt publiſhed, and they began to be ſo as ſoon as they were publiſhed, extremely voluminous and intricate. The duties, external duties at leaſt, have been multiplied by eccleſiaſtical policy, that profited of the natural ſuperſtition of mankind. The articles of belief have been multiplied, and complicated by cabaliſtical notions taken from the Jews, and by metaphyſical refinements taken from heathen theology. Children ſuffer often for the ſins of their fathers. But in this caſe the rule is inverted. The goſpel gave birth to chriſtian theology, and the goſpel ſuffers for the ſins of her licentious offspring; of that eccleſiaſtical order, I mean, who, affecting to be called the religious, have proved themſelves to be the moſt irreligious, ſociety that was ever formed, and the moſt hurtful too; as he, who compares, through the whole ſeries of their own hiſtory, the little good, with the infinite miſchief, they have done, muſt confeſs.

IT is common, and yet aſtoniſhing, to obſerve with how much ſolemnity and confidence almoſt all thoſe, who teach and defend chriſtianity, preſume to affirm any thing, tho never ſo evidently falſe, that they imagine may ſerve to recommend it; and how by theſe means they do hurt, even where they intend to do good. They do hurt, moſt certainly, to the cauſe of religion:

and the end is, in this caſe, ſo far from ſanctifying the means, that the means diſgrace the end. One artifice that they employ continually, is to confound, as much as they can, the want of power in the heathen world to reform the manners of men, by promoting effectually the practice of natural religion, and the want of a ſufficient knowledge of this religion. That the heathen ſages wanted this power is true; and that the apoſtles, ſaints, and doctors of chriſtianity have not had it, even with the help of a particular revelation, is true likewiſe: but it is as falſe to ſay that the former had not a ſufficient knowledge of natural religion, as it would be to ſay that Chriſtians have it not. The great book of nature lies open before us, and our natural reaſon enables us to read in it. Whatever it may contain, that cannot be thus read, cannot be called natural religion with any preciſion of ideas, or propriety of words; nor will the example, that has been brought, of men who aſſent readily to truths conſonant to their reaſon, which they receive from others, and would have found it hard to diſcover themſelves, he made applicable to the preſent caſe, ſo as to deſtroy the diſtinction. Mr. Locke ſhould have ſeen this ſooner than any man: and one would think a reflection ſo obvious ſhould eſcape no man. He did not, or he would not, make it. He ſeems to me, in the latter part of his Treatiſe concerning the reaſonableneſs of chriſtianity, not only to confound the want of ſufficient means to propagate,

pagate, and the want of ſufficient means to know, the religion of nature, but to play ſo looſely in his expreſſions between this religion and the chriſtian, that it is hard to diſtinguiſh ſometimes what he intends; whether he intends means of propagating or means of knowing; to what ſenſe he confines natural, and to what revealed, religion. Thus much, however, is very clear: he aſſerts the inſufficiency of "human reaſon, "unaſſiſted by revelation, in it's great and pro-"per buſineſs of morality." Human reaſon, he ſays, "never made out an entire body of "the law of nature from unqueſtionable prin-"ciples, or by clear deductions. Scattered ſay-"ings, —— incoherent apophthegms of philo-"ſophers and wiſe men —— could never make "a morality —— could never riſe to the force "of a law." Theſe aſſertions now are in part, and in part only, true. But when he comes to contraſt this ſuppoſed imperfect knowledge of the religion of nature, which the heathen had, with that ſuppoſed perfect knowledge which is communicated by the goſpel, what he advances ſtands in direct contradiction to truth. It is not true, that CHRIST revealed an entire body of ethics, proved to be the law of nature from principles of reaſon, and reaching all the duties of life. If mankind wanted ſuch a code, to which recourſe might be had on every occaſion, as to an unerring rule in every part of the moral duties, ſuch a code is ſtill wanting; for the goſpel is not ſuch a code. Moral obligations are occaſionally re-

commended and commanded in it, but no where proved from principles of reaſon, and by clear deductions, unleſs alluſions, parables, and compariſons, and promiſes, and threats, are to paſs for ſuch. Were all the precepts of this kind, that are ſcattered about in the whole New teſtament, collected, like the ſhort ſentences of antient ſages in the memorials we have of them, and put together in the very words of the ſacred writers, they would compoſe a very ſhort, as well as unconnected ſyſtem of ethics. A ſyſtem thus collected from the writings of antient heathen moraliſts, of TULLY, of SENECA, of EPICTETUS, and others, would be more full, more entire, more coherent, and more clearly deduced from unqueſtionable principles of knowledge. Nor muſt we think that this takes off from the dignity, the authority, or the utility, even in moral doctrines, of revealed religion. The law of nature was ſufficiently known, and the teachers of it, who made no pretence to any divine miſſion, had preſſed it on the minds and conſciences of mankind, the ſole way they could preſs it, by arguments drawn from the reaſon of things. Revelation was not given to do what reaſon could do alone. It was not given to convince men of the reaſonableneſs of morality, but to enforce the practice of it by a ſuperior authority.

IF there was any thing like a complete ſyſtem of morality in the goſpel, we ſhould find it in the

the fifth, ſixth, and ſeventh chapters of St. MATTHEW, ſince they contain a ſermon preached by CHRIST himſelf, not on any one particular doctrine, but on the whole duty of man. What now do we find in them? Many excellent precepts of morality, no doubt, intermingled with, and enforced by, ſeveral conſiderations drawn from his own revelations; and yet ſuch as the law of nature enjoins, or implies, and as have been practiſed by philoſophers, and other good men, among the heathen. Some of theſe, and ſome others that we find interſperſed in the goſpels, are ſuch as may be reckoned of the kind of thoſe which St. AUSTIN calls "ſublimiora "praecepta," not ſo much poſitive duties, as inſtances of greater purity and chriſtian perfection, and rather recommended than commanded. Thus, for inſtance, wherever marriage has been inſtituted, adultery has been forbid. It was ſo by the moſaic law, it is ſo by the law of nature; for tho marriage be not directly inſtituted by this law, yet every wrong, every invaſion of another man's property, and every injuſtice, is forbid by it. Now the goſpel carries this duty much farther, and declares, that "whoſoever looketh "on a woman to luſt after her, hath committed "adultery with her already in his heart." The law that forbids the commiſſion of a crime, does certainly imply that we ſhould not deſire to commit it; for to want the deſire, or to be able to extinguiſh it, is the beſt ſecurity of our obedience; tho he who is unable to extinguiſh it, and

yet abſtains from the ſin, has in the eye of reaſon a greater degree of merit. Reaſon commanded what a man may by the force of reaſon perform. Revelation commands what it is impoſſible to obey, without an aſſiſtance unknown to reaſon. Thus again, murder is forbid by the law of nature, but even anger is forbid by this; and univerſal benevolence, that great principle of the firſt, is ſtrained by the laſt to a love of our enemies and perſecutors: a precept ſo ſublime, that I doubt whether it was ever exactly obſerved any more under the law of grace, than under the law of nature; tho ſome appearances of it may be found, perhaps, under both, and at leaſt as many under one as under the other. Theſe ſublime precepts, which are peculiarly chriſtian, and ſeem deſigned to characteriſe chriſtianity, have not been obſerved by the profeſſors of it, either antient or modern. The quaker who ſays yea yea, and nay nay, and doth not ſwear at all, does not willingly part with his coat as well as his cloak, nor give away one becauſe the other has been taken from him; neither does the good man neglect to lay up ſome treaſures on earth, where moth and ruſt corrupt, and where thieves break through and ſteal. It has occurred to me often, that the ſame reaſon may be given for theſe ſublime precepts, which TULLY gives ſomewhere for the ſeverer doctrines of the Stoics. Men will always ſtop ſhort of that pitch of virtue which is propoſed to them, and it is therefore right to carry the notions of

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it as high as poſſible. Whether this reaſon will be admitted or no, I cannot tell. It ſeems to me the beſt that can be given, "et valeat "quantum valere poteſt." In all caſes theſe ſublime precepts are ſo little inconſiſtent with the law of nature, that they are this very law carried beyond the original terms of it.

THERE are beſides theſe general duties, and others of the ſame kind commanded, or recommended, by the goſpel; ſome that ſeem directed to the Jews only, and ſome that ſeem directed more immediately to the diſciples of CHRIST. Of the firſt ſort is that injunction which reſtrains divorces to the caſe of adultery; whereas by the law of MOSES, as well as by thoſe of other legiſlators, a man who did not like his wife, nor care to cohabit with her, might give her a letter of divorce, and turn her out of his doors; for which expreſs leave is given in Deuteronomy *. Of the ſame ſort are thoſe directions which tend to render the worſhip of God more intellectual, and the practice of good works leſs oſtentatious. The heathen faſted and prayed, and exerciſed charity as well as the Jews. But the divine worſhip of both conſiſted in a multitude of external duties, and in pompous rites and ceremonies; and the Jews are taxed particularly with hypocriſy, and with an affectation of doing acts of charity in public, in the ſtreets, and the ſynagogues, in order to gratify their vanity, and

* Chap. xxiv.

to be applauded by the public. Of the ſecond ſort are certain duties enjoined in this ſermon, and in other parts of the goſpel, which ſeem fit enough for a religious ſect, or order of men like the eſſenians, but are by no means practicable in the general ſociety of mankind. To reſiſt no injury, to take no care for to morrow, to neglect providing for the common neceſſaries of life, and to ſell all to follow CHRIST, might be properly exacted from thoſe who were his companions, and his diſciples in a ſtricter ſenſe, like the ſcholars of PYTHAGORAS, admitted within the curtain; but reaſon and experience both ſhew that, conſidered as general duties, they are impracticable, inconſiſtent with natural inſtinct, as well as law, and quite deſtructive of ſociety. They have not been therefore conſidered as ſuch. They have been laid aſide, and nothing more than a pretended obſervation of them has been kept up by ſome of the monaſtic orders.

IF this now be, as it is moſt certainly, a true, tho general and ſhort, repreſentation of the moral duties contained in the goſpel, and added to thoſe of natural religion, both which conſiſt in piety towards God, and benevolence towards man; will any diſciple of the philoſopher of Malmeſbury preſume to maintain, that the objection raiſed againſt religion has the leaſt force on account of them, or that they render it inconſiſtent with civil ſovereignty? He who ſhould maintain it, would fall below notice, and not deſerve an anſwer.

anſwer. But if the objection be levelled againſt the numberleſs duties ſuperadded to thoſe of the goſpel, inſtead of being levelled againſt the few that have been ſuperadded by the goſpel to thoſe of natural religion, it will be unanſwerable. Thoſe of the former ſort have been ſo increaſed, eſpecially in matters of rites, of ceremonies, and of external devotion, by the authority of the church, and in the courſe of ages, that they overload and ſtifle, as it were, true religion; nay that they ſubſtitute in lieu of it a carnal religion, ſuch as that of the Jews, and thoſe of paganiſm were. That the religion inſtituted by MOSES was ſuch in outward appearance, "in frontiſpicio quidem," ſays SPENCER, our divines admit. But they aſſert that inwardly, "in penetrali," it was divine and myſtic. The heathen ſaid the ſame of theirs; and in truth, if theirs were not very divine, they were very myſtical. Chriſtianity has completed the round, and has been brought back, in many countries at leaſt, from the ſimplicity of the goſpel to the pageantry and ſuperſtition of heathen and jewiſh obſervances.

THE ſacraments of baptiſm and the Lord's ſupper are certainly divine ceremonies, ſince they were inſtituted by CHRIST himſelf; and they may be ſaid to be myſtical too, becauſe they are intended to be viſible ſigns of ſomething inviſible. Baptiſm, or waſhing, is neceſſary to cleanlineſs and health, in warm countries eſpecially. But it was ſoon adopted by thoſe who inſtituted religions,

and applied it to inward, as well as outward, purification. It was ſo among the heathen, it was ſo among the Jews, it is ſo at this day among the idolaters in the Indoſtan, and among the Mahometans. The heathen had their public and private purifications, and we know, by other proofs beſides the acknowledgment of St. AUSTIN, that baptiſm was one of them. We know too, that the pagan ceremonies of purification had a ſpiritual meaning, and were intended to keep up a ſenſe of religion in the minds of men. "Caſtè jubet lex adire ad deos," ſays TULLY *, "animo videlicet——nec tollit caſti-"moniam corporis." The Jews employed ſeveral kinds of baptiſm. They baptiſed even their houſhold goods. Every kind had a myſtical ſignification, and the proſelytes to the law of MOSES, who were baptiſed as well as circumciſed, were underſtood to be regenerated as well as purified. The proſelyte became a new man by this ceremony, retained nothing of his former ſtate, and even his parents ceaſed to be reputed ſuch. The precurſor of CHRIST inſtituted a baptiſm of repentance; and even CHRIST himſelf, who had not certainly any need of repentance, inſiſted to be baptiſed in the Jordan, as he was after ſome modeſt reſiſtance on the part of JOHN. He was not only baptiſed before he began his miſſion: but he inſtituted this ceremony at the cloſe of it, when he ordered his diſciples to

* Lib. ii. de legib.

"baptiſe

" baptiſe all nations in the name of the Father,
" the Son, and the Holy Ghoſt."

THE communion or the ſacrament of the Lord's ſupper is another, and the only other, religious ceremony inſtituted by the ſame divine authority. We hear ſomething of ſymbols of bread, and ſymbols of the cup, which cup was of water, that were uſed in the myſteries of MITHRAS, and in others. There is, I think, no room to ſuſpect that the chriſtian communion bore any alluſion to thoſe rites in it's inſtitution, whatever it did afterwards. But the Jews had their paſſover, and in imitation of that feaſt, as well as on occaſion of it, CHRIST inſtituted his ſupper. One was deſigned to preſerve the memory of the exode, before which a deſtroying angel paſſed over the houſes of the Iſraelites, and put the firſt-born of the Egyptians to death. The other was deſigned to preſerve the memory of the death of CHRIST, which was then near, which he aſſured his diſciples had been foretold by the prophets, and would be effectual to the redemption of mankind, and to the remiſſion of ſin. No inſtitutions can be imagined more ſimple, nor more void of all thoſe pompous rites and theatrical repreſentations that abounded in the religious worſhip of the heathen and the Jews, than theſe two were in their origin. They were not only innocent, but profitable, ceremonies, becauſe they were extremely proper to keep up the ſpirit of true natural religion, by keeping up

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that of chriſtianity, and to promote the obſervation of moral duties, by maintaining a reſpect for the revelation that confirmed them. But they were ſoon perverted by the fathers of the church, who truſted ſo little to the providence of God for the propagation of this religion, that they employed the loweſt tricks of human policy for the purpoſe. They added another ſtage of external obſervances, if I may ſay ſo, in the progreſs of converts to chriſtianity, and modelled the ceremonies of it on the plan of thoſe heathen myſteries, againſt which they declaimed ſo bitterly; for the good men were apt to be bitter, as well as inconſiſtent. Baptiſm was the ceremony of purgation that preceded initiation. Neither children nor others were admitted to it, till by exorciſms, and the blowing of the prieſts upon them, the impure ſpirits were driven from them. Blowing was the firſt, waſhing the ſecond, part of this purgation. They who had gone through both were fitted to receive the influences of grace. They were the catechumens, the initiated, who partook of the firſt and leaſt myſteries: and the complete or perfect Chriſtians were thoſe, who not only partook of the greateſt, the communion, but were let into the whole ſecret of it. This third ſtage was that of conſummation, according to chriſtian, as well as heathen, theology: and it would ſcarce be poſſible to believe, that the greateſt ſaints and doctors of the church had talked ſo much blaſphemous nonſenſe, and employed ſo much artifice about it,

if

if their writings were not extant, and if we did not ſee in them, that deification in another life was promiſed to thoſe who received the chriſtian ſacraments with faith; as it had been promiſed to thoſe who went piouſly through all the myſterious ceremonies of heatheniſm. It would be ſcarce poſſible to believe that even ATHANASIUS, as well known as he is by his creed and by other circumſtances, could have had the front to aſſert, that men are united to the godhead by a participation of the Spirit, "participatione Spiritûs "conjungimur deitati;" which participation is the effect of theſe ſacraments, of that particularly, which was called "magnum et pavendum "myſterium," and the ſacrament "eminentiae "gratia," as it was then, and as it is at this hour. It would be tedious to deſcend into a greater detail here. If you have a mind at any time to do ſo, you may conſult, among other writings, the ſixteenth exercitation of CASAUBON againſt BARONIUS, where you will find enough to ſatisfy your curioſity, and more than enough to raiſe your ſurpriſe. All I ſhall ſay more concerning theſe two religious ceremonies, inſtituted by CHRIST, is this; baptiſm has been kept at no very great diſtance from the ſimplicity of it's original, and the little alteration that has been made, leaving it as much a ſign as it was before, and, no doubt, as effectual as it was before to every other purpoſe, renders the ceremony more decent by ſprinkling only with water, according to the practice of the weſtern churches,

churches, than it would be by a total immerſion, according to that of the primitive church, and of the oriental churches, if I miſtake not, even at this time. But the other inſtitution has been ſo diſguiſed by ornament, and ſo much directed, in your church at leaſt, to a different purpoſe from commemoration, that, if the diſciples were to aſſemble at Eaſter in the chapel of his holineſs, PETER would know his ſucceſſor as little as CHRIST would acknowledge his vicar, and the reſt would be unable to gueſs what the ceremony repreſented, or intended.

IT would be ſtill more tedious to deſcend into an enumeration of all the impoſitions, which the church has laid on the chriſtian world. New powers, new rights, new duties, new ſins, new ceremonies, new obſervances to be practiſed from the birth to the death of every man, all tending to the profit of the clergy, none founded on the plain authority, and many eſtabliſhed in direct contradiction to the ſpirit, and to the letter of the goſpel. Judaiſm and paganiſm gave occaſion to them. They were derived from thence. They are no parts of the chriſtian ſyſtem: CHRIST had no ſhare in their inſtitution. The manner indeed in which the goſpel was publiſhed, and much more the manner in which it was propagated, might lead deſigning, enthuſiaſtical, and ſuperſtitious men, to graft all theſe foreign branches on the ſtock of genuine chriſtianity. CHRIST himſelf was, in outward appearance,

pearance, a Jew. He ordered his diſciples, and the crowds that followed him, to obſerve and do whatever the ſcribes and phariſees, who ſat in the chair of Moses, ſhould direct *. He only warned them againſt the examples that theſe men gave, who did not practiſe what they taught, "dicunt enim et non faciunt." He was a better Jew than they, and he exhorted others to be the ſame. It is true that he commiſſioned his apoſtles to teach and baptiſe all nations †, when he gave them his laſt inſtructions. But he meaned no more, perhaps, by all nations, than the Jews diſperſed into all nations, ſince he had before that time forbid them to go into the ways of the Gentiles, and into the cities of the Samaritans ‡. He ſent them rather to the loſt ſheep of the houſe of Iſrael, and declared this in a very remarkable manner to be the object of his own miſſion, by the language he held to the canaanite woman. She endeavoured in vain to move his compaſſion. He told her it was not fit to take the bread of the children and give it to the dogs ‖: nor did he relent and cure her daughter, till he was overcome by her importunity and her faith.

These declarations of Jesus before his crucifixion, and the charge he gave to his diſciples after his reſurrection, might embarraſs them a little, and might cauſe ſome difference of opini-

* Matt. chap. xxiii. † Ibid. xxviii. ‡ Ibid. x. ‖ Ibid. xv.

on

on among them at their firſt ſetting out. So it happened: and tho a predilection for the Jews, and a ſtrong attachment to the obſervances of the law, might have been expected from St. PAUL, a zealous phariſee, who had been bred at the feet of GAMALIEL, rather than from St. PETER, a poor ignorant fiſherman; yet St. PAUL diſtinguiſhed himſelf as the apoſtle of the Gentiles, and alledged, that the goſpel of the uncircumciſion was committed unto him, as the goſpel of the circumciſion was unto PETER *. It is probable, that the firſt had made a reflection early, and had ſeen it confirmed by experience, as ſoon as he entered on his apoſtolical miſſion, that eſcaped the ſecond. The reflection I mean is this, that the contempt and averſion, in which both the nation and the religion of the Jews were held by the reſt of mankind, would make it much more eaſy to convert the Gentiles at once to chriſtianity, than to make them Jews firſt, in order to make them Chriſtians afterwards. The council of the apoſtles and the elders at Jeruſalem, to which PAUL and BARNABAS were deputed from Antioch, where the diſpute about circumciſing the gentile converts had been carried even into mutiny, was of the ſame mind. Nay St. PETER † himſelf ſpoke on that ſide of the queſtion, how much ſoever he trimmed when St. PAUL withſtood him to his face ‡, and reproved him for his diſſimulation, and the bad example he gave.

* Gal. ii. † Acts xv. ‡ Gal. ii.

It is evident, that indulgence to the Jews and to the Gentiles, in order to gain both, was a fundamental principle of apoſtolical conduct from the firſt preaching of the goſpel. Peter converſed and eat with the Gentiles at Antioch, till the arrival of certain Jews made him ſeparate himſelf from the former, fearing them which were of the circumciſion: and Paul, who reproached this prince of the apoſtles ſo harſhly for his hypocriſy, if he did not diſſemble to the elders the doctrine he taught to the Gentiles, did at leaſt diſſemble ſo far to the public, when he came to Jeruſalem and joined in the moſt ſolemn act, that the moſt rigid obſervers of the law could perform, as to expreſs a zeal for obſervances he did not much value, and for a law he thought abrogated; for that was the caſe, and that doctrine is inculcated throughout his epiſtles. In ſhort, he carried his indulgence ſo far, or he diſſembled ſo far, that he became as a Jew to the Jews, that he might gain the Jews, and to them that are without law, that is, to the Gentiles, as without law, that he might gain them too*. We have his own word for this, and he boaſts of it.

By ſuch prudent conduct, the goſpel was ſucceſsfully propagated, and converts flocked apace into the pale of chriſtianity from theſe different and oppoſite quarters; from which it is no won-

* 1 Cor. chap. ix.

der

der that they brought along with them ſeveral of their former uſages, rites, and ceremonies.

ABSTINENCE from things ſtrangled and from blood had been conſtantly obſerved by the Jews, and was one of the conditions impoſed by the chriſtian church on the Gentiles received into it. This condition was confirmed by the apoſtolical conſtitutions, and enforced, I believe, by penalties more ſevere, in ſome of the imperial. It remained long in general practice among the Chriſtians of the eaſt, and is perhaps even now practiſed by ſeveral of thoſe churches. But in the weſt it was ſoon abandoned, and will not be revived again by the zeal of our acquaintance Dr. DELANY. Abſtinence likewiſe from all kinds of nouriſhment, or the moſt rigorous faſting on ſolemn occaſions, had been obſerved in the jewiſh church, and is obſerved ſtill by the chriſtian churches of the eaſt; for as to thoſe of the weſt, they cannot be ſaid to faſt, when their manner is compared with that of the others, or with that of the Mahometans: they may be ſaid rather to feaſt very often, and only to change one kind of luxury for another.

THESE obſervances were of mere pagan or jewiſh original. Others were of a mixed kind. MOSES had made the deſtruction of idolatrous worſhip a principal object of his law; and the zeal againſt images was great among the Jews. But they made a diſtinction, which the caſuiſts

of the upper Egypt did not make, I preſume, formerly; and which thoſe of Mecca would not admit now. Images carved or emboſſed were held in horror: but a flat figure, either painted or embroidered, was allowed. A paſſage which I have read, quoted from MAIMONIDES *, is very expreſs and very clear on this ſubject. Pictures being thus introduced from judaiſm, ſtatues ſoon followed from the pagan worſhip: and the weſtern churches, if not the eaſtern, who kept more nearly to the jewiſh cuſtoms, were furniſhed like heathen temples. Confeſſion of ſins was in uſe among the heathen, ſo it was among the Jews; ſo it was, and ſo it is, among Chriſtians; and ſeveral forms of it have been preſcribed. Penance and expiation followed both in the pagan and jewiſh churches: they were derived into the chriſtian, and they have been often coſtly in all three. One ſort of penance obtained in the two laſt indeed, which I do not remember to have obtained in the firſt, that of flagellation: a ſort of penance which has been ſince applied, as the learned MEIBOMIUS aſſures us, to a very different and unholy purpoſe. In the ſynagogue, it is ſaid that the penitents flogged one another: but your church, like a more indulgent mother,

* LUD. Com. ad hiſt. aethiop. Sed hoc capiendum de imagine, quae protuberat, quales ſunt figurae ac ſculpturae in palatiis, et his ſimiles. Talem igitur ſi quis fecerit, vapulat. Sin autem figura ſit depreſſa, vel coloribus expreſſa, uti illae, quae in tabulis menſiſve fiunt, aut quae intextae operi textorio, pro licitis habentur.

allows every one to flog himſelf, and to proportion the penance to the tenderneſs of his conſcience, and the tenderneſs of his ſkin.

But to what purpoſe ſhould I mention any more of theſe particulars? A multitude of ſuch ceremonious, not to ſay ſuperſtitious rites, have been adopted by the chriſtian church, tho neither commanded, nor even recommended, by the goſpel. For this reaſon, the apoſtles do not ſeem to have been very intent about theſe, or any other forms of external ſervice. They ſeem to have diſtinguiſhed rightly between the end and the means: the end immutable, as a religion given by God muſt neceſſarily be: the diſcipline, or means of ſupporting it, mutable, as the ordinances of men muſt be according to the viciſſitude of circumſtances, and the fluctuation of human affairs. But their ſucceſſors did, and have done ever ſince, the very reverſe of this: and it is aſtoniſhing to obſerve what a buſtle they made, and what conteſts they had about the time of keeping Eaſter, and other points of diſcipline and ceremony which the apoſtles had not thought of importance enough to deſerve their deciſion, nor even their notice. All theſe fluctuated therefore extremely in the ſame churches, and varied in different churches, during the firſt ages of chriſtianity, and eſpecially until the ſynagogue was honorably buried*, if it can be ſaid

* — Donec ſynagoga honorifice ſepulta fuerit. Card. Bon. De rebus litur. lib. i.

to

to be ſo even at this day. I interpoſe this doubt, not only becauſe there remains a tang of judaiſm among ſeveral of the eaſtern ſects, which will not appear ſtrange to thoſe who know that the chriſtian church of Jeruſalem judaiſed during a ſucceſſion of fifteen biſhops; but becauſe the weſtern ſect, your pretended catholic church, inſtead of aſſerting evangelical freedom from the bondage of the moſaical law, or rather whilſt ſhe aſſerts it, has introduced many things from this very law, and has the front to juſtify them on the authority of it, under a new diſpenſation that takes all authority from it, according to St. PAUL. Ointment, holy water, incenſe, tapers, the conſecration of altars, and the celebration of jubilees, are of this kind. But I think that your doctors would not ſound ſo high this authority, if theſe things were alone concerned. There are others which import them more, and which they have been obliged to eſtabliſh on jewiſh authority, for want of any better; and it is for the ſake of ſuch inſtitutions that they have deemed it expedient to accuſtom men to reſpect this authority on other occaſions, on ſuch particularly as relate to the immediate ſervice of God, of which cuſtom, not reaſon nor revelation moſt certainly, has made them to paſs for eſſential parts. The divine right of tithes was eſtabliſhed by the law of MOSES. By virtue of that law, the chriſtian prieſthood claim it. The naſci was the pontiff of the Jews, and the head of their church. From hence an argument the more for the ſupreme au-

thority of the pope. Councils are derived from the ſanhedrin; and the whole ſyſtem of the hierarchy and of eccleſiaſtical regimen from the conſtitution of the jewiſh church. I take no notice here of the ſhare which paganiſm had in all that has been mentioned, either immediately, or mediately through judaiſm. Enough is ſaid for my preſent purpoſe: and obſervations of that ſort will be more neceſſary under another head.

Let thoſe now, who object to religion on account of external duties, rites, ceremonies, and eccleſiaſtical inſtitutions, learn to be more juſt in their cenſures. Let them learn to diſtinguiſh rightly between thoſe things which the goſpel requires, and thoſe which the church impoſes. If they do not make this diſtinction, their objections are trifling; and if they do make it, they may have the concurrence of every ſincere and intelligent Chriſtian along with them, for reaſons which are not theirs indeed, ſince they are intended to ſtrengthen and confirm, not to weaken nor explode, religion. When we conſider how ſtrong the impreſſions of ſenſe are, and how they are apt to controll that which ſhould controll them, we may find, perhaps, very ſufficient reaſon to incline us to approve in general the uſe of ceremonies and the pomp of external ſervice in religion. To keep up a ſenſe of it in the minds of men, there ſeem to be but two ways. To ſtrike the ſenſes frequently by public and ſolemn acts of religious worſhip; and to heat

heat the brain by notions of an inward operation of the Spirit, and of a ſort of myſtical devotion independent of outward forms, or even inconſiſtent with them. One of theſe leads to ſuperſtition, the other to enthuſiaſm. Both are ſilly: but the laſt is bad in this reſpect, it is leſs governable and leſs curable. Superſtition is folly. Enthuſiaſm is madneſs. It is good to be on our guard againſt both. But I am to ſpeak in this place of the firſt alone: and as to that, the ſolemn magnificence of a church, the grave and moving harmony of muſic, the pomp and order of ceremonies decently performed, the compoſed looks, and the myſtical veſtments of the prieſts who perform them; all this, I think, cannot fail to inſpire an awful reſpect, and to maintain a devout attention of mind in the generality. Here and there a man, perhaps, may take theſe ceremonies, and thoſe who perform them, for what they are; and not be impoſed upon by them, either before or after the celebration of ſuch rites as theſe. But during the celebration of them, whilſt the ſpectacle is before his eyes, and the ſound in his ears, I think that the ſame impreſſions will be made in ſome degree even on ſuch a man as this. You and I knew BETTERTON and Mrs. BARRY off the ſtage, as well as on it; and yet I am perſuaded neither of us could ever ſee JAFFIER and BELVIDERA without horror and compaſſion. I do not pretend to decide in the diſpute about the pomp of external ſervice; I only ſpeak according to what I have felt. But

tho I do not take part, on the whole, for the uſe or diſuſe of church ceremonies, it may be allowed me to declare againſt the abuſe of them all, as a friend, not as an enemy, to religion. It is certain that this abuſe has defeated the very end to which they were directed, or which ſerved as a reaſon for the introduction of them; and has ſubſtituted ſomething, which is not religion, in the place of it. Our ſpiritual guides have run into very wild extremes. Some have ſhewed a great diſregard to good works, and have talked of juſtifying faith alone, as the ſole means of ſalvation, and in contradiſtinction to good works; like the ſcotch preſbyterian parſon, who aſſured his brethren from the pulpit, that immorality had deſtroyed it's thouſands, but morality it's ten thouſands. Others have inſiſted much on good works, but they have confounded the nature of them. They have rather meant, by good works, the practice of arbitrary duties, which eccleſiaſtical diſcipline has eſtabliſhed, or eccleſiaſtical authority recommended, and which are beggarly elements indeed, than the practice of thoſe moral duties which reaſon preſcribes as well as revelation. How much they prefer the former to the latter, may appear by the univerſal practice of moſt chriſtian countries. In ſome, the man who ſtabs his enemy goes to confeſſion, and his conſcience is never at quiet till he has purchaſed abſolution by money, or by penance, or by both. The woman who lies in the arms of her adulterer will leap out of bed, and knock her forehead,

forehead, and beat her breaſt, at the tinkling of a little bell in the ſtreet. Nay in the country where I have paſſed ſo many years of my life, where bigotry is leſs prevalent, generally ſpeaking, than in others of the ſame communion, the poor man who has eat an egg in lent, when eggs have not been permitted by the biſhop, and who had perhaps nothing elſe to eat, cannot be abſolved of this heinous ſin by the ſame prieſt that might abſolve him for neglecting the worſhip, or offending againſt the law of God. The former ſin is of a blacker dye than theſe, and he muſt have recourſe for abſolution to an higher authority: which is an imitation of the Jews likewiſe, among whom any offence againſt the ritual law was puniſhed more ſeverely than crimes much more grievous in their nature, as I believe it has been obſerved already after Dr. SPENCER. But enough has been ſaid concerning duties added by the goſpel to natural religion, and duties added by the church to thoſe of both. It is time to ſpeak of articles of faith, which make a third and laſt part of the analyſe of chriſtianity.

SECTION VIII.

IT is this part that has furniſhed matter of ſtrife, contention, and all uncharitableneſs, even in, as well as from, the apoſtolical age. It is this that has added a motive the more, and one that is ſtronger than any other, to animoſity and hatred, to wars and maſſacres, and to that cruel princi-

ple which was never known till Chriſtians introduced it into the world, to perſecution for opinions, for opinions often of the moſt abſtract ſpeculation, and of the leaſt importance to civil or religious intereſts. It is this, in ſhort, whoſe effects have been ſo fatal to the peace and happineſs of mankind, that nothing, which the enemies of religion can ſay on the ſubject, will be exaggerated beyond the truth. But ſtill the charge they bring will be unjuſtly brought. Theſe effects have not been cauſed by the goſpel, but by the ſyſtem raiſed upon it: not by the revelations of God, but by the inventions of men. We diſtinguiſhed before between the original and the traditional proofs, and we muſt diſtinguiſh here between the original and traditional matter of theſe revelations. The goſpel of CHRIST is one thing, the goſpel of St. PAUL, and of all thoſe who have grafted after him on the ſame ſtock, is another.

I WILL not ſay that one article of belief alone is neceſſary to make men Chriſtians, the belief that JESUS was the Meſſiah promiſed to the Jews, and foretold by their prophets. This may be the primary, but it is not the ſole object of our faith. There are other things doubtleſs, contained in the revelation he made of himſelf, dependent on, and relative to, this article, without the belief of which I ſuppoſe that our chriſtianity would be very defective. But this I ſay; the articles of belief, which CHRIST himſelf exacted by what he

he ſaid, and by what he did, have been lengthened immeaſurably, and, we may add, both unneceſſarily and preſumptuouſly, by others ſince his time. The ſyſtem of religion, which CHRIST publiſhed, and his evangeliſt recorded, is a complete ſyſtem to all the purpoſes of true religion, natural and revealed. It contains all the duties of the former, it enforces them by aſſerting the divine miſſion of the publiſher, who proved his aſſertions at the ſame time by his miracles: and it enforces the whole law of faith by promiſing rewards, and threatening puniſhments, which he declares he will diſtribute when he comes to judge the world. Beſides which, if we do not acknowledge the ſyſtem of belief and practice, which JESUS, the finiſher as well as author of our faith, left behind him, to be, in the extent in which he revealed and left it, complete and perfect, we muſt be reduced to the groſſeſt abſurdity, and to little leſs than blaſphemy.

THESE reaſons, which cut up the root of artificial theology, deſerve, for that reaſon, to be more fully explained. If we do not acknowledge them, we aſſume that the Son of God, who was ſent by the Father to make a new covenant with mankind, and to eſtabliſh a ſpiritual kingdom on the ruins of paganiſm, and the reformation at leaſt of judaiſm, executed his commiſſion imperfectly; we aſſume, that he died to redeem mankind from ſin, and from death the wages of ſin, but that he left them at the ſame time without ſufficient

ſufficient information concerning that faith in him, and that obedience to his law, which could alone make this redemption effectual to all the gracious purpoſes of it; ſince we might riſe to immortality indeed by the merits of his paſſion, but this reſurrection might be to damnation too, unleſs an entire faith in him, co-operating with our imperfect obedience, juſtified and ſaved us. In ſhort, we aſſume that they, who were converted to chriſtianity by CHRIST himſelf, and who died before the ſuppoſed imperfection of his revelation had been ſupplied by the apoſtles, by PAUL particularly, lived and died without a ſufficient knowledge of the terms of ſalvation; than which nothing can be ſaid more abominable. Natural religion may be collected, ſlowly perhaps, tho ſufficiently by natural reaſon, from the works of God, wherein he manifeſts his will to mankind. But a religion, revealed by God himſelf immediately, muſt have been complete and perfect, from the firſt promulgation, in the mind of every convert to it, according to all our ideas of order: and if we conſider it as a covenant of grace, the covenant muſt have been made at once, according to all theſe ideas, and all thoſe of juſtice. No new articles of belief, no new duties, could be made neceſſary to ſalvation afterwards, without changing the covenant: and at that rate how many new covenants might there not be? How often, I ſay it with horror, might not God change his mind?

WILL it be urged, as an anſwer to what has been ſaid, that the explanations and additions, which have been made, were made by the ſame authority that made the original covenant, in order to aſcertain the terms, and to ſecure the effect, of it; and that there is therefore no reaſon to find fault that they were made? But if this ſhould be ſaid, inſtead of removing one abſurdity and profanation, it will only ſerve to advance another. The force of the objection reſts on the very aſſertion contained in the anſwer, on the ſameneſs of the authority. If the additions were not ſaid to be made by the ſame authority, they would be entitled to little regard, and the objection would vaniſh. But ſince they are ſaid to be ſo made, and ſince they make a change in the covenant, for a covenant is changed by additional conditions, tho the original remain ſtill in force, the objection is confirmed by the anſwer; and a farther abſurdity ariſes from it, or the ſame abſurdity appears in a new light. If it was neceſſary that the apoſtles, who were filled with the Holy Ghoſt, or other inſpired perſons, ſhould publiſh, by the aſſiſtance of the Spirit, any knowledge neceſſary to ſalvation, which JESUS had not taught, or explain the covenant of grace more perfectly than he had done, it follows, that the third perſon of the trinity was employed to aſſiſt the ſecond in making a more full and perfect publication of the goſpel: which comes too near the caſe of poor mortals who want this aſſiſtance

aſſiſtance to receive and practiſe the goſpel as they ought, and to whom it is given to ſupply the imperfection of their nature. Upon the whole, have we not reaſon to diſtinguiſh with an holy fear between the original ſyſtem of chriſtianity, and the very beſt, if that could be aſcertained, of all thoſe diſcordant ſyſtems into which the pure ore of the goſpel has been ſo often melted down and caſt anew, during ſeventeen centuries, at different times; and every time with ſuch a mixture of human alloy, that no one of them can carry, without fraud, the image and ſuperſcription of our heavenly CAESAR?

CHRISTIANITY, as it ſtands in the goſpel, contains not only a complete, but a very plain ſyſtem of religion; it is in truth the ſyſtem of natural religion: and ſuch it might have continued, to the unſpeakable advantage of mankind, if it had been propagated with the ſame ſimplicity with which it was originally taught by CHRIST himſelf. But this could not have happened, unleſs it had pleaſed the divine providence to preſerve the purity of it by conſtant interpoſitions, and by extraordinary means ſufficient to alter the ordinary courſe of things. Such a conſtant interpoſition, and ſuch extraordinary means, not being employed, chriſtianity was left very ſoon to ſhift for itſelf, in the midſt of a frantic world, and in an age when the moſt licentious reaſonings, and the moſt extravagant ſuperſtitions, in opinion and practice, prevailed univerſally under the

the reſpectable names of theology and metaphyſics; and when the Jews themſelves, on whoſe religion, and on the authority of whoſe ſcriptures, chriſtianity was founded, had already gone far in corrupting both by oral traditions and cabaliſtical whimſies, by a mixture of notions taken from the chaldaic philoſophy during their captivity, and from the grecian philoſophy ſince the expedition of ALEXANDER. The traces of theſe mixtures are diſcernible: thoſe of greek origin moſt manifeſtly; and among them, thoſe of platoniſm are ſo ſtrongly marked, that it is impoſſible to miſtake them. This philoſophy was the very quinteſſence of the theology and metaphyſics which PLATO, and PYTHAGORAS before him, had imported into Greece. It had been extracted by the intenſe heat of the warmeſt imagination that ever Greece produced, and had contributed more, than any other ſyſtem of paganiſm, to turn theiſts into enthuſiaſts, and to confirm that fondneſs for myſtery, without an air of which no doctrine could paſs for divine. What effect all theſe circumſtances had on chriſtianity, and how they ſerved to raiſe an intricate, voluminous, and contentious ſcience on foundations of the greateſt ſimplicity and plainneſs, it may be worth while to examine more particularly, and in ſuch a detail as the nature of theſe eſſays, which are not deſigned to be treatiſes, and my confined knowledge of antiquity permit. The extent of one and the other will be ſufficient, perhaps, for our purpoſe.

SECTION IX.

MEN have accuſtomed themſelves to talk ſo vaguely about myſteries, that the very meaning of the word is become a myſtery. The whole New teſtament has been called the goſpel, and the whole goſpel a myſtery: both very improperly; for the firſt confounds what ſhould be always diſtinguiſhed in favor of the original ſyſtem of chriſtianity: and the ſecond is abſurd in the higheſt degree, ſince nothing can be conceived to be more ſo, than to predicate two contradictory terms of the ſame ſubject. To affirm that a thing is and is not exiſtent at the ſame time, is juſt as reaſonable as to affirm, that the goſpel is at once a revelation and a myſtery, a thing ſhewn and a thing hidden. That there are many ambiguous expreſſions, and many dark ſayings, in the goſpel; that there are many doctrines, which reaſon would never have taught, nor is able to comprehend now they are taught, cannot be denied. Nay the utmoſt human endeavours have been, and muſt be always, employed in vain to reduce the intire plan of divine wiſdom in the miſſion of CHRIST, and the redemption of man, to a coherent, intelligible, and reaſonable ſyſtem of doctrines and facts. Is it ſtrange that it ſhould be ſo? It could not be otherwiſe. Two of the evangeliſts recorded, as witneſſes, what they ſaw and heard in this extraordinary conjuncture: and two others what

what they were told about it. Not the whole indeed; for then "the world could not have contained "the books that would have been written;" but as much as was neceſſary, and even a little more than was ſtrictly ſo, to account for the eſtabliſhment of the ſpiritual kingdom of CHRIST, as it is called improperly enough, and to explain the laws of it, and the conditions of admiſſion into it. If a great prince ſhould ariſe in any country, make an intire revolution in the conſtitution of it, reform ſome, and aboliſh others, of the antient laws and cuſtoms, and eſtabliſh a new government on new principles of government, would it not be ſufficient for the people to know his right in general, and the meaſures of their obedience in particular? Would they complain, if ſome things eſſential to neither, and ſcarce relative to the latter, were obſcurely mentioned in any of his declarations or conſtitutions, that they wanted a complete ſyſtem of the government to which they ſubmitted themſelves, and were therefore obliged to ſupply on their own authority what they had not received on the authority of their legiſlator. I think they would make no ſuch complaint. Reaſonable men I am ſure would not. To ſuch, the whole would appear plain enough; and they would reſolve to believe and obey it in the obvious and literal ſenſe, whilſt a few buſy, over-curious, and deſigning politicians might render what was plain, intricate; and two or three dark expreſſions the ſubject of perpetual diſpute, and irreconcileable diviſion, by their refinements.

refinements. Thus the peace of ſociety might be broken, and the very end of government be defeated, not by any want of neceſſary information, but by an affectation of knowing more than the legiſlator thought it neceſſary that they ſhould know. Such as I have repreſented theſe politicians in civil government, ſuch have divines and metaphyſicians ſhewn themſelves in religion: and it is full as unjuſt to charge the miſchiefs that have followed in one caſe, on religion, as it would be to charge thoſe that would follow in the other, on government.

THE only way to have prevented ſuch miſchiefs as theſe from ariſing in the city of God would have been this, that Chriſtians ſhould have adhered cloſely to the goſpel, as it was taught by CHRIST himſelf; that they ſhould have thought it, as he thought it, ſufficient for them; have received implicitly what is plainly revealed in it, and have avoided all dogmatical deciſions on things obſcure or doubtful. Explanations in all theſe caſes ſerve only to multiply diſputes, and to eſtabliſh religion on human, inſtead of divine, authority. This affords a rule invariable as God himſelf. The other fluctuates as the opinions, and even the intereſts of men vary. Under one, Chriſtians might have continued united in the ſame communion, and even members of the ſame family, friends and brethren. Under the other, it is impoſſible that this, which is the great object of chriſtianity, ſhould

ſhould be obtained: and therefore I am willing to believe that they, who had been the immediate diſciples of the Saviour, preached his goſpel in a ſpirit of union, in ſo ſimple a ſtyle, and in ſo ſtrict and ſcrupulous a conformity to the revelations he had made, in what form ſoever the writings of theſe men have come down to us, through very interpolating hands, that there neither was, nor could be, any diviſion among them, nor any ſeeds of diviſion ſowed by them. He who compares the epiſtles of JAMES, of PETER and JOHN, ſuch as we have them, with thoſe of PAUL, and all theſe with the doctrines of the goſpel, will be perhaps of this opinion: at leaſt he will have no ground to ſay of the three firſt, that they were authors of new goſpels; as he will have grounds to ſay of the laſt, and as the laſt does in effect ſay of himſelf. He will be of this opinion too the more eaſily, on account of a very ſenſible difference in the manner, as well as the matter, of their writings. There is a moſt remarkable and amiable anecdote to this purpoſe mentioned by ſome writers, and for which the authority of JEROM is cited. St. JOHN had been long confined in the iſland of Pathmos, to which DOMITIAN had baniſhed him, and where it is pretended that he writ the Apocalypſe, that ſtrange rhapſody of unintelligible revelations, as they are called moſt abſurdly. It is much more probable, and more for the honor of the evangeliſt, as well as of chriſtianity, to believe that they were compoſed by CERINTHUS, by a viſionary

nary of the ſame name as that of the apoſtle, or by ſome other enthuſiaſt. They were not admitted into the canon at Laodicea, nor would have been ever admitted to diſgrace it, if JUSTIN, IRENAEUS, ORIGEN, and TERTULLIAN, in whom the love of myſtery was a kind of delirium, and after their example ſeveral of the other fathers, had not crowded them into the canon by receiving them as canonical. The anecdote I am about to produce will ſhew how far St. JOHN was, tho his goſpel gave him the title of the theologian, from multiplying and propagating myſteries, and how he retained that character of plainneſs and ſimplicity, which he had acquired in the ſchool of his divine maſter. DOMITIAN dead, and NERVA emperor, the holy evangeliſt returned to his church at Epheſus, threeſcore years after the death of JESUS. Not only the goſpels, his own among the reſt, which it is ſaid that he writ at the deſire of his people as ſoon as he returned to them; but even the epiſtles were then writ, and the ſyſtem of chriſtianity had taken, in moſt of the churches at leaſt, the form which PAUL had given it. If the good old man, feeble and decrepit, was unable to make long ſermons, it appeared that he did not think them very neceſſary neither; for when he ſpoke in the public aſſemblies, the ſum of what he ſaid was, "Children, love one an-"other." The people of Epheſus, where PAUL had been, where he boaſted that he had fought with beaſts after the manner of men, where he had

had certainly made long and myſtical diſcourſes, were diſappointed and diſſatisfied with the ſuccinct and plain doctrine of their biſhop: but when they expoſtulated with him upon it, they had a very ſhort and deciſive anſwer, "This the "Lord commands: and if you do this, it is "ſufficient." He ſpoke to men who believed already in JESUS the Meſſiah, and in all that he had juſt before recorded in the goſpel he publiſhed at their requeſt, after his return from Pathmos. Whatever others might think, he thought that the goſpel wanted no further explanations, nor extenſions; and contented himſelf therefore to recal to their memory, on every occaſion, that fundamental article of the law of nature, and the law of the goſpel, univerſal benevolence.

THE character of St. JOHN was not that of St. PAUL. One had been formed in the boſom of JESUS; called to be a diſciple, and commiſſioned to be an apoſtle, inſtructed by the doctrine and example of his maſter. He had, like PETER and the reſt, no other ſcience, and what that was the four evangeliſts tell us. PAUL, on the contrary, had been educated in the ſchools of the law, ſuch as the law was become in thoſe days, when oral tradition, cabaliſtical myſteries, and ſcraps of pythagorician, platonic, and even ſtoician, doctrines had been blended with it, and compoſed the moſt extravagant ſyſtems of philoſophy and religion. The maſters of all this learning were the Phariſees, whoſe ſect began pro-

bably two hundred years before CHRIST, and was in the higheſt reputation when he came into the world. Of this ſect was PAUL; and he continued in it till he was about forty years old, "profiting in the religion of the Jews above "many of his equals——exceedingly zealous of "the traditions of his fathers——and perſecuting "the church of God *." After this, he, who had reſiſted ſo many miracles, was converted by a miracle, which he and his amanuenſis LUKE have related. He was called by God himſelf in a great light, which was always underſtood to denote ſome divine preſence, to be an apoſtle, a choſen veſſel, repleniſhed with gifts of the Holy Ghoſt, and overflowing with grace. His peculiar deſtination was to preach CHRIST, whom God had revealed in him, among the heathen: and this he began to do immediately, for being made an apoſtle by a diſtinct commiſſion from the "reſt, he "conferred not with fleſh and blood, "nor went up to Jeruſalem to them which were "apoſtles before him," but preached as ſoon as his eyes were opened, as he had received the impoſition of hands, and as he had been baptiſed, by virtue of a particular inſpiration, that goſpel, of which he ſpeaks to the Galatians with ſo much confidence, that he pronounces every one, who ſhould preach any thing different from it, himſelf, an angel from heaven, and therefore moſt certainly even the other apoſtles, accurſed. It was not till three years

* Epiſt. to the Galatians, chap. i.

after

after his journey into Arabia, and his return to Damaſcus, that he went to Jeruſalem, where he communicated privately to them, which were of reputation, the goſpel he preached to the Gentiles; for he might want their approbation, tho he did not want their information nor advice: and this he obtained ſo far, that they gave him and BARNABAS the right hand of fellowſhip; that theſe two ſhould preach the goſpel to the Gentiles, and they, that is, the other apoſtles, to the children of Iſrael.

THIS ſhort deduction of facts, taken from St. PAUL's own account of himſelf, and in which he aſſured the Galatians before God that he lied not, may ſerve to introduce an obſervation touched upon already, and more eaſily made than explained. In the laſt chapter of his epiſtle to the Romans, he calls the goſpel he preached, my goſpel; "which expreſſion he cannot be ſuppoſed to "have uſed, ſays Mr. LOCKE in his note on the "paſſage very juſtly, unleſs he knew that what he "preached had ſomething in it, that diſtinguiſhed "it from what was preached by others." But what that was we are left by this able commentator to ſeek. It was not plainly, what he ſays it was plainly, "the myſtery of God's purpoſe of taking in the "Gentiles to be his people——and without ſub-"jecting them to circumciſion, or the law of "MOSES." If this myſtery, ſo inconſiſtent with the declarations and practice of JESUS, was revealed to PAUL, it was revealed to the apoſtles

too, ſince they preached and publiſhed the glad tidings of ſalvation indifferently to Jews and Gentiles; in doing which, had this myſtery been revealed to him excluſively of them, they would have been apoſtles of PAUL in this inſtance, rather than of CHRIST. If the exemption of the gentile converts from circumciſion, and other obſervances of the moſaical law, was the myſtery, the myſtery was explained by the decree of the council of Jeruſalem; by which nothing more was required of the Gentiles, than to "abſtain "from idolatry, or meats offered to idols, from "fornication, and from blood." St. PAUL aſſumed indeed, that not only the vocation of the Gentiles, but this exemption in favor of them and of the Jews too, were myſteries revealed particularly to him. It is evident however, that the other apoſtles and the elders looked on it as no myſtery at all, and that they treated it as a matter of diſcipline: ſo that a queſtion may ariſe, whether St. PAUL was, what the pope pretends to be, above the council, or the council above him. The apoſtles had given no directions to inſiſt, that the Gentiles ſhould, or ſhould not, ſubmit to circumciſion, and to the yokes of the law, which St. PETER ſcruples not to ſay, in his ſpeech on that occaſion, were ſo heavy, that "neither they nor their fathers were able to bear "them *." In a word, by the opinion St. JAMES delivered, and by the whole tenor of the decree, it is manifeſt, that the miſtaken zeal for the

* Acts chap. xv.

law,

law, which ſome of the Jews retained after their converſion, and perhaps the immoderate zeal of St. PAUL for an immediate and total abolition of it, had given riſe to this diſpute, and that it was determined not as a point on which the divine purpoſe had been revealed to PAUL, or any one elſe, but, according to what has been juſt now ſaid, as a point of diſcipline left to the diſcretion of the apoſtles and elders, whoſe ſole regard was to prevent any ſchiſm in a church hardly yet formed, and who for that reaſon, whilſt they indulged the Jews in circumciſion and other ritual obſervances of their law, exempted the Gentiles from the far greateſt and heavieſt part of them.

But there is ſomething more to be obſerved. If the purpoſe of God was to take the Gentiles to be his people under the Meſſiah in this manner; if their abſtaining from jewiſh rites and ceremonies was a poſitive law of God under the new covenant, as the abſtaining from idolatry was both under the new and under the old, how came it to paſs, that the Meſſiah himſelf gave no inſtruction about it to his apoſtles, when he ſent them to preach his goſpel to all nations, and, as we may ſay, to people his kingdom, which they did chiefly out of the gentile world? Why was the revelation of this important myſtery, ſo neceſſary to be publiſhed at the very firſt publication of the goſpel, if it was the eternal purpoſe of God, or elſe not neceſſary at all, reſerved for St. PAUL, who was then a perſecutor, not a preacher, of the

goſpel, and whoſe apoſtleſhip did not begin before the converſions? Shall we ſay that this eternal purpoſe of the Father was unknown to the Son? We ſhall blaſpheme if we do. Shall we ſay that it was known to him, but that he neglected to communicate it to the firſt preachers of his goſpel, and gave them imperfect inſtructions? The profanation will be little leſs. Theſe queſtions, and ſome others of the ſame kind, will not be eaſily anſwered, unleſs it be by men who are never at a loſs to account for the abſurdities that they impute to the divine conduct, by ſuppoſing it directed according to ſuch partialities as are proportioned to the lowneſs of their minds. But the pertneſs, not to ſay the impudence, of theſe men deſerving no regard, we muſt ſeek another ſolution of the difficulty, and endeavour to find what it was that diſtinguiſhed St. PAUL in this reſpect from the other apoſtles, and gave him a reaſon for calling the goſpel he preached his own goſpel.

SOME ſolution of this ſort may occur to us, perhaps, if we reflect on what was mentioned above concerning the difference between the manner, in which St. PAUL preached the goſpel, and that of the other apoſtles; which difference marks very ſtrongly the different ſchools wherein they had been inſtructed, and had formed the habits that characteriſed them, the ſchool of CHRIST and the ſchool of GAMALIEL. From one of theſe the apoſtles had brought great modeſty and gentleneſs of temper, a ſhort, familiar, and ſimple ſtyle, like

like that of their Lord and maſter. From the other St. Paul carried into the apoſtleſhip, with a great ſtock of jewiſh learning, a great deal of that aſſuming air which is apt to accompany much learning, or the opinion of it: and accordingly we find him obliged more than once in his epiſtles to excuſe his boaſting, and the value he ſet on himſelf, by ſuch humble expreſſions, as a man, who had not been full of the Holy Ghoſt, might, in his caſe, have taken a pride in uſing. He carried with him likewiſe, from the phariſaical ſchools, a great profuſion of words, and of involved unconnected diſcourſe, even on thoſe ſubjects which required to be the moſt clearly and diſtinctly developed, if they were to be inſiſted upon at all, and not to be paſſed over in ſilence rather, or touched very tranſiently, as they had been by the other apoſtles. The other apoſtles were all evangeliſts, that is, they were publiſhers of the glad tidings of ſalvation: they declared to the world that the kingdom of the Meſſiah, that is, the ſpiritual kingdom, was begun; and they taught men the indiſpenſable conditions of belief and practice, in order to be admitted into it. Farther than was neceſſary to this purpoſe they did not affect to carry their doctrines. They meaned to convince, not to perplex, the minds of men. They knew that by doing the laſt they ſhould obſtruct the firſt; or ſhould give great advantage to the falſe doctors that were ariſen, and were to ariſe, to corrupt chriſtianity. St. Paul was a looſe para-

paraphraſer, a cabaliſtical commentator, as much at leaſt as any antient or modern rabbin; and tho his goſpel was, in the fundamental principles of it, the ſame as theirs, yet he mingled it up with ſo much of his own theology, that he might not improperly, and in one ſenſe, call it his own, and that we may call him the father of artificial theology. Not content to reveal myſterious truths in propoſitions whoſe terms were intelligible, tho the manner of being of theſe truths was ſtill a myſtery (which is no objection to the belief of any thing contained in a revelation once proved to be divine) he amplified them, deſcanted upon them, opened the whole economy of divine wiſdom from ADAM to CHRIST, and accounted for the ſeveral diſpenſations of God to man. The original goſpel, ſuch as the other apoſtles preached it, was a plain ſyſtem of belief and practice, fitted for all times, and proportioned to all underſtandings. St. PAUL's goſpel, if it may be ſaid to be fitted as much as the others for all times, of which I doubt, cannot be ſaid to be proportioned to all underſtandings. It is evidently not ſo to the underſtandings of the deepeſt divines, and the moſt ſubtile metaphyſicians; ſince they have been wrangling about it from that time to this, and have eſtabliſhed the moſt oppoſite doctrines on the ſame texts, to the breach of all charity, and the diſturbance of the chriſtian world *.

* I will mention a little more fully, in this note, what I omitted in the text. All that is ſaid there, is ſaid relatively

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IT may be ſaid that ſome paſſages in the four goſpels, and even ſome expreſſions of CHRIST recorded

to received interpretations and opinions, ſuch as Mr. LOCKE would have admitted, and were therefore proper to be followed in reaſoning againſt him. But if I am to ſpeak my own opinion; the matter in queſtion may be decided more ſhortly, and on the whole more conſiſtently. St. PAUL then might very well talk of his goſpel, even in contradiſtinction to that of CHRIST; ſince he taught ſeveral doctrines which had no foundation in that of CHRIST, and others, as I have ſaid, that were directly repugnant both to the word and example of the Meſſiah. CHRIST profeſſed judaiſm, and declared himſelf ſent to the Jews alone, and not even to the Samaritans, ſo poſitively, that when he commiſſioned his apoſtles, he may be, and, to make him conſiſtent, ought to be underſtood to have meaned no more, than to ſend them to the Jews diſperſed in all nations. St. PAUL, on the contrary, inſtead of grafting chriſtianity on judaiſm, inſiſted on an entire abolition of the latter; to which, however, he had conformed moſt hypocritically on more occaſions than one; and his doctrine became, not at once, but in time, the doctrine of the chriſtian church. This may appear ſtrange to thoſe who read, without a free conſideration of what they read: and it will appear ſtill more ſtrange to them to find a pagan emperor, and a great enemy both of Jews and Chriſtians, introduced as an inſtrument appointed by God to accompliſh his ſecret deſigns in confirming the doctrine of St. PAUL's goſpel; and yet ADRIAN is ſo introduced by SULPICIUS SEVERUS; for he ſays, that the chriſtian church at Jeruſalem having had till that time none but Jews in the epiſcopal chair, and the greateſt part of the faithful there believing in JESUS CHRIST without departing from

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recorded in them, have been liable to various interpretations, and have produced ſuch diſputes and conteſts as theſe which I aſcribe to the writings of St. PAUL. But altho this be undoubtedly true, the difference between the original goſpel, and that of St. PAUL, is very real, and very manifeſt. One is a plain and clear ſyſtem of religion, with here and there a doubtful phraſe that caſts no obſcurity on the reſt. The other is an intricate and dark ſyſtem, with here and there an intelligible phraſe that caſts no light on the reſt, but is rather loſt in the gloom of the whole. By faith I may believe, but by faith I cannot underſtand. A propoſition, the terms of which are unintelligible, is an abſolute myſtery: to ſay that we are bound to believe myſteries in this ſenſe, is itſelf nonſenſe; to ſay we do believe them, is a lie. But a propoſition, the terms of which are intelligible, may be an object of faith, tho we underſtand by it nothing more than the terms; when it is ſupported, as was ſaid above, by divine authority, nay often when it is ſupported only by human. A man, upon whoſe knowledge and ſincerity I ought to depend, reveals to me a few mathematical truths, which, in certain circumſtances, it is neceſſary I ſhould know, and troubles me neither with the demonſtrations which I might not be able to comprehend, nor

the legal ceremonies, that edict of ADRIAN, which hindered Jews from going to Jeruſalem, was of great uſe to chriſtianity: by which we muſt underſtand the chriſtianity of St. PAUL's goſpel, and not that of CHRIST's.

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with many corollaries to be drawn from them which I do not want. Another, the ſcholar of the firſt, and of leſs authority than his maſter, brings me a paper filled with diagrams, and letters, and figures, which, he aſſures me, contains demonſtrations of the former truths, and explanations of ſeveral corollaries deducible from them. I underſtand neither. Thoſe whom I conſult appear to underſtand them as little as myſelf, by their diſputes about the meaning of them. The truths, which were clear and ſufficient for me in ſimple propoſitions, as I received them firſt, are involved in myſtery; and then incoherent, figurative diſcourſe thickens the cloud.

LET any man read the epiſtles we have of this apoſtle's writing, after he has read the goſpels; let him read the former, as he would read any other books of philoſophy or theology; let him call in Mr. LOCKE to his aſſiſtance, who has ſucceeded better, perhaps, than any other expoſitor, by happier conjectures, and no greater licence of paraphraſe, in giving an air of coherence, conſiſtency, and rationality to theſe epiſtles, and in making them intelligible: ſuch a man will not be able, after all his pains, to ſhew any one myſtery that is left unfolded in the conciſe language of the goſpel taught by CHRIST and his apoſtles, that has been rendered leſs myſterious by the prolixity of St. PAUL. St. PAUL rather doubles myſtery than ſimplifies it, if I may ſay ſo; and adds every where a myſtery of words to

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a myſtery of things. That they, who have, ſince his time, and after his example, grafted theology on revelation, extended the doctrines of it, explained and applied the prophecies, types, and figures, invented new ones of every ſort, and raiſed a variety of diſcord and ſyſtems on the ſame ſimple and uniform plan, ſhould be for the moſt part very little intelligible, is not wonderful. He, who has clear and diſtinct ideas in his mind, will write clearly and diſtinctly: and the author who puzzles an attentive reader is firſt puzzled himſelf, how common ſoever it be, in the ſcience we ſpeak of here particularly, to ſee thoſe admired the moſt who are the leaſt underſtood. That has been the caſe of theſe men. They have pretended to inſtruct others on ſubjects, on which it was impoſſible they ſhould have clear and diſtinct ideas, or indeed any ideas at all. But that St. PAUL ſhould write confuſedly and unintelligibly, he who was illuminated by the Holy Ghoſt, that he might enlighten the Gentiles, and he who received all he taught by immediate revelation, muſt be always a problem not eaſy to reſolve. "He was, it is "ſaid, a man of quick thought and warm tem-"per——verſed in the writings of the Old teſta-"ment, full of the doctrines of the New—ſo "that one may conſider him, when he was "writing, as beſet with a crowd of thoughts, "all ſtriving for utterance *." But are we not to conſider him too, when he was writing, as a

* LOCKE's preface to his Paraphraſe &c.

man under the influence of actual inſpiration? And was not divine inſpiration ſufficient to keep him from falling into thoſe faults, want of order and perſpicuity, into which none but the meaneſt of uninſpired writers are apt to fall? Mr. LOCKE ſhould have thought ſo, ſince St. PAUL ſays, that "the ſpirits of the prophets are ſubject to the pro-"phets †:" and he in his Paraphraſe, that "Chri-"ſtians, however filled with the Holy Ghoſt—"are not hurried away by any compulſion." A neglect of eloquence, and the ornaments of ſpeech, became an apoſtle. But it is hard to diſcern how a neglect of order and perſpicuity ſhould be apoſtolical, ſince the deſign of ſuch a miſſion is to inſtruct and to convince.

SECTION X.

AFTER ſaying ſo much of the unintelligibility of PAUL's goſpel, truth authoriſes me to add, that where it is intelligible it is often abſurd, or profane, or trifling. Is not the doctrine of paſſive obedience, which he teaches, moſt intelligibly abſurd? Is not that of abſolute predeſtination moſt intelligibly profane? Is not one of them repugnant to common ſenſe? Is not the other as repugnant to all the ideas of God's moral perfections? Would not either of them be ſufficient to ſhake the credit even of CHRIST's goſpel, if they were contained in it?

† 1 Cor. c. xiv.

But it remains that I give an inſtance of the moſt intelligible trifling that we find in this goſpel; and this inſtance will lead us to obſerve in what manner chriſtianity was taught and propagated by the firſt converts to it in their public aſſemblies, and how eaſily extenſions of it, or engraftments on it, might be made. We hear much of the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit that were beſtowed on theſe converts, ſuch as propheſying, working miracles, and ſpeaking in unknown tongues; which are enumerated, with ſeveral others, by St. Paul in the twelfth chapter of his firſt epiſtle to the corinthian proſelytes. The laſt of theſe gifts belonged more properly to thoſe who were deſigned to be miſſionaries of the goſpel, that they might be able to convert unbelievers more effectually in their diſperſion over different countries. But where churches were eſtabliſhed, St. Paul * prefers the uſe of the language of the place, diſlikes the affectation of uſing any other, and indulges it only when there is an interpreter at hand. The gift of prophecy, by which he intends not only prediction, but ſinging of pſalms, and teaching the doctrines of religion in their public aſſemblies, is that to which he aſſigns the firſt place. Now this gift every one might exerciſe, even the women. They are ordered, indeed, by ſome paſſages, to keep ſilence in the churches †, and if they will know any thing, to aſk their huſbands at home: and yet it is plain,

* 1 Cor. c. xiv. † 1 Cor. c. xiv.

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by other paſſages of the ſame epiſtle *, that they were allowed to propheſy, as it is called, and that they did ſo before the congregations. This apparent contradiction is reconciled by aſſuming, that tho they were not on every ordinary occaſion to act the part of teachers and inſtructors, yet they were not debarred from it, when by any extraordinary motion and impulſe of the Spirit they were determined to exerciſe this function. The only diſpute was, whether they ſhould exerciſe it covered or uncovered: and this material point was decided by St. PAUL. He let the Corinthians, among whom this diſpute had ariſen, know, "that the head of every man is CHRIST, "and the head of the woman is the man, and "the head of CHRIST is God:" from whence he concludes that a man, "who is the image and "glory of God—having his head covered, diſho-"noreth his head;" but that a woman, who "is the glory of the man, with her head unco-"vered, diſhonoreth her head; for that is all "one as if ſhe were ſhaven †." This argumentation may not appear very concluſive, nor indeed very intelligible, to us; but it was both, I doubt not, to the Corinthians: and in all caſes it ſerves to ſhew that both ſexes had their revelations, and a right to publiſh them.

THE apoſtle ‡ proceeds afterwards to give directions for keeping better order in the public aſſemblies, which were held with great confuſion,

* 1 Cor. xi. † Ibid. ‡ 1 Cor. chap. xiv.

whilſt every one was impatient to ſhew his gifts, and they could not ſtay to do it one by one. Even theſe directions left room for ſome confuſion ſtill. Two or three might propheſy at the ſame meeting, one after another, and the reſt of the congregation were to judge; which not only begat debate, but cauſed interruptions, that uſually beget altercation. That this muſt have happened we may aſſure ourſelves, ſince by one of the rules St. PAUL preſcribes, if any thing was revealed to a ſitter by, the ſpeaker was to hold his peace. SIMON the magician would have bought the power of beſtowing the gifts of the Holy Ghoſt by the impoſition of his hands, as he ſaw them beſtowed by PETER and JOHN; and SIMON had embraced chriſtianity, and had been baptiſed. In an age, therefore, when a communication of theſe gifts was eſteemed ſo common and ſo eaſily given, it could not but be, that multitudes thought they had ſome or more of theſe gifts, and eſpecially that of propheſying; and that as ſome imagined piouſly they had inſpirations when they had them not, ſo others, even this magician, tho the apoſtles had rejected his offer, affected impiouſly to have them. It could not be hard to paſs falſe revelations on a world, on whom it was ſo eaſy to paſs falſe miracles; which this very SIMON, and other ſuppoſed magicians, and real impoſtors, did very frequently.

THIS opinion of divine illuminations and revelations

velations being once eſtabliſhed, an abſtruſe theology being once graſted on the plain doctrines which the goſpel taught, and an example being ſet of extending the ſyſtem beyond it's native ſimplicity by collecting paſſages here and there, and by comparing and applying them in a cabaliſtical manner, even according to the ſound very often, rather than the import of the words; the natural conſequences did not fail to follow among the illiterate and ſuperſtitious Jews and Gentiles, who were the firſt converts to chriſtianity. I need not ſtay to point out theſe conſequences. Hiſtory antient and modern does that ſufficiently, and even our own experience in ſome degree. Every man, who has heard of the language and behaviour of men poſſeſſed with fanaticiſm, may point them out to himſelf. But enthuſiaſm, ſuperſtition, and the abuſe of religion were not confined to the moſt illiterate. A multitude of new doctors aroſe, all of whom pretended to have divine knowledge, and ſome to be divine perſons. A multitude of doctors formed a multitude of ſects: the followers of SIMON the magician, as he was thought by thoſe who were no conjurers themſelves, the diſciples of CARPOCRAS and of CERINTHUS, of CERDON, MARCION, and, ſoon after theſe, of MANES, the Nicholaites, the Valentinians, and many others; for they grew up apace.

THESE men had the Old teſtament and ſeveral goſpels and ſeveral apoſtolical epiſtles before

them, for no canon of ſcripture was yet ſettled, nor till more than three centuries afterwards; tho it may ſeem not a little extraordinary that this ſhould have been neglected, whilſt the tradition, that could alone eſtabliſh the authenticity of theſe writings, was freſh enough to be itſelf authentic. The writings, however, that paſſed all for authentic in ſome or other of the chriſtian churches, theſe men had. Nay ſome of them had been hearers of the apoſtles, and had begun to dogmatiſe at the ſame time. Neither they nor their ſucceſſors had the ſame ſpirit. But they aſſumed the ſame liberty, and by adding allegory to allegory, type to type, myſtery to myſtery, and one arbitrary interpretation to another, chriſtianity became a confuſed chaos of theology. Such it continued long, and ſuch it is, in ſome degree, even now: for tho many of the ſyſtems that were formed out of it, and that were coeval with it, wore out in the ſpace of three or four centuries, many others ſprung up from the ſame ſeeds, and were nurſed into maturity and ſtrength by the ſame culture. Nay ſome of the ſame ſeeds produce now and then, even at this day, and in our own country, a feeble weed or two in the vineyard of the Lord. Some of the churches, which were eſtabliſhed by the apoſtles or their immediate ſucceſſors, and which maintained a charitable correſpondence together, might maintain likewiſe, for aught we know, with greater purity of manners, a greater purity of doctrine. But we muſt not believe,

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on the firſt head, that they who diſſented from them, and were therefore called heretics by them, fell into ſuch abominations as have been repreſented by IRENAEUS, TERTULLIAN, EPIPHANIUS, and other fathers, who were very choleric, very foul-mouthed, and often guilty of ſcandalous exaggeration. A charge that may be brought with the more confidence, ſince it is ſupported by their own writings that are extant, and by men of the greateſt authority in eccleſiaſtical literature; and ſince it can be neither denied, evaded, nor excuſed by thoſe who are the leaſt willing to own it. As we muſt not believe all that the fathers advance on this head, ſo muſt we not believe on the other, as many good people ſeem to do, that the primitive Chriſtians had an uniform plan of theology, explained as we explain it, and underſtood as we underſtand it. The ſyſtem ſwelled inſenſibly faſter among ſome, more ſlowly among others: and they ſeemed to agree much better than they did in reality, as it appeared when criticiſm came in faſhion, and they were obliged to expreſs themſelves with more preciſion concerning the principal articles of their faith.

SECTION XI.

ALL theſe ſects may be comprehended under the general name of gnoſtics, or learned and illuminated. At firſt they affected to have it thought, that they alone were both one and the

other, and to deſpiſe ſuch as could not diſcover all they pretended to diſcover of the hidden ſenſe of the ſcriptures, and of the myſteries of chriſtianity. But the orthodox grew, in time, as much gnoſtics as others: and we ſee that CLEMENT of Alexandria * thought it neceſſary to be ſo, in order to be truly religious. Illumination, and the gifts of the Spirit, ſerved to eſtabliſh this chriſtianity: but philoſophy, and the ſciences, were of uſe to confirm and improve it. No ages nor countries could be more prepared to adopt every theological and metaphyſical notion, even the moſt extravagant and leaſt intelligible, than thoſe wherein the chriſtian religion was firſt publiſhed and propagated. Egypt, and the eaſtern kingdoms, had been famous ſchools of a reputed divine philoſophy. PYTHAGORAS had gone to them all. PLATO had gone to the former only. But what he had not acquired at the firſt hand, from the gymnoſophiſts, the followers of ZOROASTER, the magi, and other oriental maſters; he acquired at the ſecond, by converſing with the italic philoſophers, and by a ſtudy of their writings. He ſays ſomewhere, that the Greeks improved and mended all they borrowed from the barbarians; which I am far from believing to be true. But if PYTHAGORAS and he carried any ſcience farther than their maſters, I incline to think it was the moſt fantaſtic.

SINCE the works of PLATO are in our hands,

* Strom. lib. vii.

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we may ſpeak of him and his theology with more aſſurance, than of thoſe who went before him, or of their doctrines. Thoſe of ORPHEUS, or thoſe that paſſed under ſuch a name in antient Greece, were chiefly mythological; thoſe of PYTHAGORAS, ſymbolical; and thoſe of PLATO, metaphyſical, with a mixture of the other two. Nothing could be more proper, nor effectual, to promote fantaſtical knowledge, than a method of philoſophiſing by fables, ſymbols, and almoſt a perpetual allegory. But the founder of the academy did more. He poiſoned the very ſource of all real knowledge, by inducing men to believe, that their minds are capable of abſtracting, as no human mind can abſtract, and of acquiring ideas, that it is impoſſible any human mind ſhould perceive. He pretended to raiſe a myſtic ladder, on which we might not only clamber up by dint of meditation to a region of pure intellect, wherein alone is knowledge, and leave ſenſible objects behind us, concerning which nothing better than opinion is to be had; but find at the head of it incorporeal eſſences, immaterial forms, ſpiritual beings, and perhaps the Logos or ſecond god: as the ſupreme God is ſuppoſed to have been at the head of the ladder JACOB ſaw in his dream. Angels went up and down one: philoſophers were to go up and down the other.

THIS philoſopher dealed little in phyſics: and he was in the right to neglect them. Me-

taphyſics ſerved his purpoſe better. Hypotheſes of the former kind muſt be founded in ſome real knowledge: how high ſoever the top of the ladder reaches, the foot muſt ſtand firm on the earth. But hypotheſes of the other kind are more eaſy to be framed, and leſs eaſy to be controlled. Thus, for inſtance, an intellectual world being once aſſumed, wherein the ideas, the forms, the patterns of all that exiſt in the ſenſible world reſide, it was eaſy to people it with numberleſs intellectual, that is, ſpiritual, that is, immaterial, that is, ſimple beings without extenſion or ſolidity, that is, beings of which theſe refiners had negative, but no poſitive ideas. They were at liberty afterwards to ſuppoſe whatever relations they pleaſed between theſe beings, and between them and men. Metaphyſical hypotheſes, in ſhort, are not content to account for what may be by what is, nor to improve ſcience according to the conditions of our nature, by raiſing probability on the foundations of certainty: but the makers of them affect to range in the immenſe void of poſſibility, with little or no regard to actuality; and begin very often, as well as end, in ſuppoſition. Not only their ſyſtems are hypothetical, but the firſt principles of them, and the very ideas and notions which compoſe them, are hypothetical too.

Such a philoſopher, ſuch a teacher of imaginary and fantaſtic knowledge, Plato was. Notwithſtanding which, or for which reaſon rather,

rather, he grew ſoon into great vogue in Greece, and in thoſe countries where grecian literature was propagated after the expedition of ALEXANDER. This philoſophy could not fail to be well received in thoſe countries, from the ſchools of which it had been derived originally: and it floriſhed accordingly, and triumphed, as it were, over all others in ſome parts of Aſia, and in Egypt, whilſt it made it's way into Italy, and was propagated weſtward through the roman empire. The Jews of Paleſtine, and they who lived under the protection of the PTOLEMIES, had taken a ſtrong tincture of heathen philoſophy, and of this in particular. The doctrines of the immortality of the ſoul, of a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments, and even that of a metempſychoſis, were adopted by the learned amongſt them; tho they were rejected by thoſe who adhered to the letter of the law: for MOSES had taught nothing of this kind. If any ſuch hints are contained in other books of their ſcriptures, it is impoſſible to ſay when, or by whom thoſe books were written, with the leaſt aſſurance, notwithſtanding all the dogmatical impertinence of ſcholars: whereas we know, that all their ſacred writings were compiled after their captivity, and that the canon of them was long in ſettling. It is poſſible, therefore, and even evident, that if they knew any thing of theſe doctrines, which had not been tranſmitted to them by MOSES, before their acquaintance with the greek philoſophy, they muſt have learned it from the nations

tions among whom they had been mixed, and from whom the Greeks had learned the ſame, from the Chaldeans, and even from the Egyptians, with whom they had commerce, and in whoſe country many of them found a refuge in the deſolation of their own by the Babylonians. But if they had ſo learned it, they had learned it very darkly; for there is no inſtance that ſhews they underſtood, received, or taught theſe doctrines, till long after their firſt acquaintance with the Greeks.

But, be all this as it will, it is certain that platoniſm was an eſtabliſhed philoſophy among the Jews before the coming of Christ, and that it was much more ſo among the Chriſtians afterwards. It is aſtoniſhing to conſider how fond the Chriſtians were, in the firſt ages of this church, to believe, and to make others believe, that all the myſteries of their religion had been revealed by the writings of pagan philoſophers, many centuries before they were ſo by the preaching of Christ and his apoſtles: as if the latter could want, or the former give, any additional authority. It was to promote this opinion, that ſo many books were forged under the names of Mercurius Trismegistus, of Hystaspes, of the Sybils, and perhaps of others. Theſe forgeries, indeed, were ſo groſs, that they might be well ſuſpected even at the time they were publiſhed. Their credit, however, was maintained till they had had in ſome degree the effect they were

were deſigned to have. When they could have this effect in any degree no longer, they were rejected, and even condemned. There was the leſs need of them for the abſurd purpoſes to which they were applied, becauſe the writings of PLATO *, writings indiſputably his, were public; and becauſe his works alone, wherein was mingled much of the pythagorean and other antient theology, formed an ample and ſufficient repertory of theological fables and ſymbols, and of metaphyſical myſteries. They, who have employed themſelves from thoſe days to ours in raiſing ſyſtems of divinity on the goſpel, and impoſing their own inventions by pretending the authority of it, have contented themſelves accordingly with the aſſiſtance of PLATO and ARISTOTLE; of the maſter for ſublimity of matter; of the ſcholar for ſubtilty of form.

IF the abſurdity of thoſe, who have gone about to explain, to confirm, and even to improve, chriſtianity by the doctrines and authority of paganiſm, be, as it is ſurely, very aſtoniſhing; we muſt confeſs, that it is ſtill more aſtoniſhing to obſerve the ſtrange conformity between platoniſm and genuine chriſtianity itſelf, ſuch as it is taught in the original goſpel. We need not ſtand to compare them here: particular inſtances of conformity will occur often enough.

* "Res enim et verba ſcholam PLATONIS ſapiunt, iis "exceptis, quae miſcet e libris divinis." CASAUB. ſpeaking of one of theſe books, in his Exercit.

In general, the platonic and chriſtian ſyſtems have a very near reſemblance, "qualis decet eſſe "ſororum:" and ſeveral of the fathers, as well as modern divines, have endeavoured with all their might, by forced conſtructions, and ſometimes by no very faithful extracts, to make this reſemblance appear ſtill greater. Ridiculous endeavours, no doubt; ſince they give unbelievers occaſion to ſay, that if the doctrines are the ſame, they muſt have been deduced from the ſame principle; and to aſk what that principle was, whether reaſon or revelation? If we ſay it was reaſon; they will reply, that reaſon could not diſcover what reaſon cannot comprehend when it is diſcovered. A myſtery may be an object of faith to him, to whom it is communicated in an intelligible propoſition. But it muſt be an object of knowledge in him who communicates it, and requires an aſſent to it on his own authority, that is, on a confidence that he knows it to be true, and that it is no myſtery to him. If we ſay it was revelation; they will reply, that PLATO then muſt have been illuminated by the Holy Ghoſt; that he muſt have been the precurſor of the Saviour, as ſome platonic bigots have ventured, with a very little ſoftening to the term, to call him; and that he muſt have been a precurſor too of more importance than St. JOHN. St. JOHN inſtituted a baptiſm of repentance; and much has been ſaid by antient and modern doctors in theology to ſtate the difference between this baptiſm and that of

CHRIST; baptiſm with water *, and baptiſm with the Holy Ghoſt and with fire †. Theſe terms, as dark as they are, ſhew however a manifeſt difference: and there can be no doubt that the baptiſm of JESUS was much more effectual, than the baptiſm of JOHN: as that of JOHN was effectual to higher purpoſes, than that of the Jews. But PLATO, inſtead of calling on men in general to repent, and of inſtituting one myſtical ceremony, anticipated the goſpel on ſo many principal articles of belief and practice, that, as ſome divines ſay the goſpel was a republication of the law of nature, the unbelievers will ſay it was a republication of the theology of PLATO. They will argue a fortiori, that ſince the republication of theſe myſteries was made by divine revelation, the publication of them muſt have been of neceſſity made by the ſame means: and they will conclude, perhaps, by aſking with a ſneer, whether a man, whoſe paſſion for courteſans, and handſome boys, inſpired him to write ſo many lewd verſes, was likely to be inſpired by the Holy Ghoſt?

SUCH conſiderations as theſe are more than ſufficient to explode the impertinent and profane notion, that PLATO was inſpired immediately, or that he had, in any lower degree metaphyſicians can imagine, ſuch a ſhare of divine illumination as enabled him to diſcover, in part at

* In aqua in poenitentiam.

† In Spiritu ſancto, et igni. MAT. cap. iii.

leaſt

leaſt, thoſe myſterious truths that were not to be fully revealed till the Meſſiah came. But the queſtion returns, how came he to diſcover them, even in part, near four centuries before the Meſſiah did come? or how came they to make a part of that pagan theology from which he took them? A plain anſwer may be made to theſe queſtions: and I think there is no other that can be reconciled to common ſenſe. I have hinted at it already: but it requires to be more explained. All we can know of the divine nature, of the attributes, providence, and will of God, muſt be communicated to us by his word, or collected by us from his works. The heathen philoſophers had not his word, and they corrupted all the knowledge they acquired from his works by their manner of philoſophiſing. They not only haſtened too raſhly from particular to general knowledge, and from a few imperfect obſervations of the phaenomena, to the moſt extenſive hypotheſes; but they raiſed hypotheſes independently of the obſervations they made, or might have made; and then reaſoned on theſe hypotheſes as from certain principles of knowledge: ſo that the little real knowledge they acquired a poſteriori was controlled by that which they fancied that they acquired a priori; and thus the whole maſs of the firſt philoſophy was corrupted. They diſcovered, in his works, a firſt intelligent cauſe of all things, a Being of infinite power and wiſdom, whoſe providence is over all his creatures, and whoſe will, relatively

to

to man, is manifeſted in the whole human ſyſtem. Here was abundant matter of real knowledge. Thus far the Supreme Being lets himſelf down, if I may uſe ſuch an expreſſion, within the verge of human comprehenſion, and of human alone, as far as we can judge of the animal world about us. Beyond this fixed point we can have no real ideas, and therefore no real knowledge. All that we may imagine we have, is, and muſt be, fantaſtical. We are no more able to acquire knowledge beyond, than other animals up to, this point: and the divine nature, the manner of being, the moral attributes of God, the general ſyſtem of his providence, are as inſcrutable to man as to them. His will too, according to which they are determined by natural inſtinct, is as inſcrutable to us, as to them, beyond the bounds of natural revelation, unleſs a ſupernatural revelation communicate farther knowledge: which it did not to theſe philoſophers.

WHAT now was their proceeding? did they ſtop where the means of knowledge ſtop? Not at all. Where the ſyſtem ended, the hypotheſis began; and with this difference between theſe and all other hypotheſes, that thoſe which are made in phyſics are made on ſubjects on which we have much knowledge, and means in our power of acquiring more; whereas hypotheſes in theology are made on a ſubject we know little of, and have not the means of knowing more. Error in the former may be corrected by improvement

ment of knowledge: error in the latter cannot, becauſe there can be no improvement beyond the point where ſuch hypotheſes begin. It has been obſerved in theſe eſſays, and more than once, perhaps, that there are philoſophers who boaſt much of the power which the human mind has of ranging far and wide in the regions of poſſibility, and of perceiving what may be, as well as what is; from whence they draw very fooliſh concluſions in favor of human underſtanding. Now that the mind of man has ſuch a power, we know moſt conſciouſly. But we know, or may know too as conſciouſly, that the exerciſe of this power is dangerous; and that he, who does not uſe it under a ſtrict control of judgment on imagination, will be ſure to render his conduct and his ſcience both fantaſtical. PLATO, like all the divines of paganiſm, was far from preſerving ſuch a control. No man had more imagination; no man controlled it leſs.

IT would be eaſy to conceive, if we had not his works before us, that ſuch extravagant methods of philoſophiſing muſt have produced the moſt extravagant opinions; and he who reads theſe works, like a man in his ſenſes, will be tempted to think, on many occaſions, that the author was not ſo. I ſay, on many occaſions; for on ſome it is certain, that he writes like a very pious and rational theiſt and moraliſt. But on the whole, his writings are pieces of patch-work; and there are few of them that do

do not abound in falſe ſublime and low images, in things above comprehenſion, in things below notice, in the brighteſt truths, and the foulеſt errors: and, to come to the preſent purpoſe, ſome of them abound in notions that are agreeable to the chriſtian ſyſtem, and in others that are repugnant to it; or that, bearing an appearance of likeneſs, nay of ſameneſs, are much more proper to promote ſuperſtition and enthuſiaſm, as in fact they did, than true religion. Theſe conſiderations, every one of which may be juſtified by the moſt famous of his dialogues, gave occaſion, perhaps, to ſome difference that aroſe in the reception of platoniſm by the chriſtian fathers. St. CHRYSOSTOM, it is ſaid, declaimed againſt it: and I remember a paſſage in TERTULLIAN *, wherein he complains, that the ſeeds of hereſies were ſcattered in PLATO's books of the republic, and in his doctrine of ideas, which he calls "haeretica idearum ſa-"cramenta†." The greateſt fathers of the church, however, tho they differed in other things, agreed in admiring PLATO; and borrowed much of their theology from him. Such were JUSTIN, ORIGEN, JEROM, AUSTIN, to quote no others; and the firſt the moſt remarkably. But how venerable ſoever their names may be, their conduct was in this reſpect extremely abſurd, injurious to the goſpel, and derogatory to the authority of it, as will appear undeniably

* De anima. †—In ideis platonicis gnoſticorum haeretica ſemina relucere.

by the reflections I had in view when I ſaid that a plain anſwer might be made to thoſe, who ſhould aſk how the myſterious truths of the goſpel could be known, without divine illumination, to PLATO.

SECTION XII.

THE reflections I meant are theſe. What the Chriſtians borrowed from PLATO's works was not contained in the goſpel, or it was contained in it. If no ſuch thing was contained in it, the preſumption of thoſe was inexcuſable, who added a ſingle doctrine to the chriſtian ſyſtem, or even an explanation of a doctrine, on the faith of an heathen philoſopher, whoſe theiſm, tho purer than that of others, had ſtill a tang of ſuperſtition, and even of polytheiſm. With reſpect to God, this preſumption was a profanation: with reſpect to man, it was a fraud. The Chriſtians who were guilty of it impoſed, on themſelves, or, if not on themſelves, on others as far as their authority extended, the word of PLATO for the word of God. If the things they borrowed were contained in the goſpel, they had no reaſon whatever for borrowing; or this muſt have been their reaſon, they muſt have thought the authority of PLATO neceſſary to confirm that of CHRIST, or reaſon neceſſary to render complete what revelation taught imperfectly. The firſt is a blaſphemous, and the ſecond a ſilly, thought. Reaſon is neceſſary and ſufficient to

eſtabliſh revelation, as it has been ſhewed above. But when the truth of a revelation is eſtabliſhed, we are to believe implicitly; the uſe of reaſon ceaſes, her interpoſition grows impertinent, and nothing can be more ſo than the affectation of antient and modern divines, to baniſh her out of her province, or to appeal to her very weakly in it; whilſt they introduce her into another, and would be thought to reſt upon her where ſhe has nothing to do. Whenever they do this, they go out of their ſtrength: and reaſon, improperly uſed, becomes a much better weapon of offence in the hands of their enemies, than of defence in theirs; as the writings of many eminent divines may demonſtrate.

If reaſon now be ſo ill employed about myſteries that are propoſed, ſhe is ſtill leſs fit, and leſs likely, to propoſe them. Montagne would ſay, they are not her game. The object of reaſon is truth, intelligible, attainable truth: and if ſhe goes at any time, in purſuit of it, into that well where it lies concealed, as Empedocles, Democritus, and the reſt of the antient philoſophers complained ſo loudly, ſhe never plunges ſo far into the dark, as to be unable to diſtinguiſh it from error. Divine myſteries ſhe receives implicitly, but ſhe advances none of her own under that title: and a reaſonable man, and a myſtic man, ſeem two diſtinct ſpecies. All myſteries, that are not communicated expreſsly by revelation, are produced by me-

taphyſical delirium and religious enthuſiaſm; to both of which men of the brighteſt genius have been often tranſported. SENECA declares a man, who does not riſe above humanity, contemptible *. Many have thought they did ſo, and, ſober on all other ſubjects, have been ſtark mad on theſe; for there is a madneſs quoad hoc, if I may ſay ſo: and neither you nor I could be at a loſs to cite ſeveral, and ſome living, examples of it. But there is too a degree of affectation ſometimes in this apparent madneſs, employed for different purpoſes. The metaphyſical delirium may be kept up by a reputation, which ſingularity alone is often ſufficient to acquire; and much more by an opinion of making new diſcoveries in the intellectual world. This affectation, ſuſtained by his own warm imagination, and by thoſe of his egyptian and pythagorean maſters, poſſeſſed PLATO very ſtrongly, and anſwered very effectually his purpoſe in the acquiſition of fame. He knew the people with whom he had to do; he knew that no mythology was too groſs, no pretended abſtractions too whimſical, for them: and nothing can ſhew ſo much either how he had turned their heads, or how eaſily heads were turned by the marvellous in thoſe days, as the general opinion that prevailed of his divine birth. APOLLO appeared to ARISTO his father, and forbad him to enjoy his wife during the ſpace of ten months;

* O quam contempta res eſt homo, niſi ſupra humana ſe erexerit!

which

which was a very unneceſſary precaution, if the poor man had often tried and never could; and if PERICTIONE was a virgin when the ſame god appeared to her in a viſion, and ſhe conceived. Thus PLATO was begot to be a phyſician of ſouls, as AESCULAPIUS had been to be a phyſician of bodies.

PLATO might ſafely give a looſe to all the extravagance of his imagination in ſuch an age, and be aſſured that the wildeſt hypotheſes would paſs for ſyſtems of ſublime knowledge, and that the doctrines the leaſt underſtood would be the moſt admired. He improved this advantage to the utmoſt: and it happened, as it might, without inſpiration or miracle, that in his rambling ſpeculations about the divine and ſpiritual nature, about the immortality of the ſoul, about God's diſpenſations in this life and another, and various matters relative to theſe, he blundered on ſome divine truths that were not quite beyond human apprehenſion, according to human ideas; tho they had not been yet revealed to mankind, nor ſtripped of types and figures, thoſe ſacred hieroglyphics, wherein they lay involved. This anſwer to the queſtion above-mentioned is plain and full: for if events, that were to come to paſs in the order of providence, were foretold ſometimes by men who neither knew any thing of this order, nor even that they propheſied when they did propheſy, as divines have ſometimes ſaid; why ſhould not ſome truths, that

were to be manifeſted in after-ages by divine revelation, be anticipated by human imagination? Human reaſon would have never diſcovered them, becauſe they are no more objects of intuitive, nor of demonſtrative, than they are of ſenſitive, knowledge; but imagination, conceiving them poſſible, might impoſe them for true on minds wherein ſhe exerciſed the plenitude of her power. Chriſtians, therefore, might have given this anſwer, and have evaded by it the abſurdity of ſuppoſing PLATO inſpired, and the difficulty of accounting for the chriſtianity of his doctrines without this ſuppoſition.

SECTION XIII.

I Have inſiſted, and muſt inſiſt again a little largely, on the theology of PLATO; tho I have ſaid a great deal in a former eſſay concerning his philoſophy in general, in order to ſhew the more fully and clearly on what original authority we reſt in matters of religion; and becauſe his works have been made, after the writings of St. PAUL, a principal foundation of all that theology which has occaſioned ſo many diſputes in the world, and has rendered the chriſtian religion obnoxious to the cavils of infidels: one of which I undertake to refute by ſhewing that it is not religion, but theology, which has done all the miſchief complained of ſo loudly and ſo juſtly. Genuine chriſtianity was taught by God. Theological chriſtianity is a

religion

religion that men have invented, and that has defeated the deſign, by pretending the authority, of the former. Human paſſions, human intereſts, human fallibility, not thoſe of particular doctors alone, but thoſe of the church ecumenically aſſembled, from the nicean council down to that of Trent, have had their ſhare in compoſing the preſent intricate, inconſiſtent, and voluminous ſyſtem. I can eaſily believe that ſome of theſe divines meaned to preſerve the purity of it, and to promote revealed religion. I can believe too that ſuch philoſophers as SOCRATES and PLATO, who contributed to deſtroy, whilſt they pretended rather to reform, polytheiſm and idolatry, meaned to reſtore the purity of theiſm, and to promote natural religion. But here a difference between them, which is very well founded, and worthy of obſervation, begins to ariſe. The latter could ſupport their doctrines by no authority except their own. The former had always the pretence of ſpiritual gifts to authoriſe them.

FAITH in CHRIST the Meſſiah is the firſt principle of chriſtianity, an article as plain as it is eſſential. But there are other articles in the goſpel darkly revealed, becauſe doubtfully expreſſed; beſides ſeveral in the other parts of the New teſtament, the ſenſe of which never has been fixed. Chriſtian divines have ſuppoſed all theſe alike eſſential. They have ſuppoſed that, as obedience is better than ſacrifice, faith is as

eſſential, or more eſſential, than works: and every ſect has ſuppoſed the underſtanding and believing theſe ambiguous paſſages in the ſenſe, in which their teachers expound them, neceſſary to the ſalvation promiſed in the goſpel. Thus it happened formerly, and thus it happens ſtill, that the objects of faith vary in every chriſtian ſect: and as neutrality in the civil conteſts of the athenian commonwealth was branded with a note of infamy; ſo in theſe religious conteſts, as they are falſely called, he who takes no ſide is ſtigmatiſed for an infidel by all; and he who takes any ſide is given over for an heretic to the hangman here, and to the devil hereafter, by every ſide except his own. In ſhort, it is not enough to believe like a Chriſtian, it is made neceſſary that men, women, and children ſhould decide like metaphyſicians, or believe without knowing what they believe.

If we may be allowed to think, and they who prefer the example and doctrine of CHRIST to thoſe of PAUL will find reaſon to think, that the Meſſiah intended rather to reform, and to graft upon, judaiſm, than to aboliſh it; we may think too that SOCRATES and PLATO intended rather to reform paganiſm, and to graft ſomething leſs carnal and more ſpiritual upon it, than by a more direct oppoſition to the rooted prejudices of their age and country to aboliſh them quite. This pious attempt coſt the maſter his life; and made the ſcholar, perhaps, not only involve his doctrines

doctrines in greater obſcurity, but ſeem, at leaſt in ſeveral inſtances, favorable to the abſurdities of paganiſm. SOCRATES was a zealous miſſionary of morality: and the obligations of natural religion in public and private life were taught and preſſed upon men both by him and PLATO, not only from motives that reaſon ſuggeſts, but by inculcating the doctrine of the immortality of the ſoul, a doctrine the moſt uſefully believed, and the moſt weakly proved, ſays CHARRON *; and of a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments, which they had learned from the Egyptians, among whom theſe doctrines had prevailed from an unknown antiquity, and not from the Jews, who could not derive theſe doctrines from MOSES, and who do not appear to have entertained them till they began to tag their law with the ſcraps of philoſophy.

ADORATION of the Supreme Being, gratitude and reſignation to the order of his providence, were the great internal duties of religion, that theſe philoſophers taught: and it is eaſy to diſcern what they thought of external worſhip, by ſeveral paſſages in PLATO. In his book Of laws he directs indeed that men ſhould reſort to the public temples, deliver their victims and offerings to the prieſts, and ſacrifice and pray there only. But even in that place, where he ſeems to have ſo much regard to the uniformity of public worſhip, he hints ſufficiently in what eſteem he held

* De la ſageſſe, lib. i. c. 15.

it,

it, by his invective againſt the ſuperſtition of private devotions; which, after all he ſays againſt them, were founded on the ſame principles, and performed on the ſame model, as thoſe of eſtabliſhed and public worſhip. He ſpeaks moſt reaſonably, in the Second Alcibiades, of the regard God has to a pious diſpoſition of mind; and humorouſly enough of this external worſhip, as of an account that men pretend to keep with God, as with a banker or uſurer; whereby acts of devotion performed, and benefits received, may be balanced. But the paſſage I chuſe to cite precedes theſe in the ſame dialogue. After ſhewing that men aſked things contrary, and even hurtful to them, SOCRATES commends the prayer of the poet, who aſked JUPITER to grant his friends ſuch things as were good for them, whether they prayed that they might have them or not, and to refuſe ſuch as were hurtful, even when they deſired them. From hence he takes occaſion to commend likewiſe the cuſtom of the Lacedemonians, who aſked for good in general, and for nothing in particular, "pulchra cum bonis," in all their prayers public and private. They were not, however, he ſays, leſs happy than other people: and upon that occaſion he tells ALCIBIADES a ſtory, which he had heard from certain old men. The Athenians, being always beaten at land and at ſea by the Lacedemonians, conſulted JUPITER HAMMON to know why the gods were more favorable to their enemies, who did not

not worſhip them with the ſame pomp and expence as the Athenians did? HAMMON anſwered, that the acclamations, that is, the prayers, of the Lacedemonians pleaſed him better, than all the religious rites and ceremonies of the other Greeks.

NOT only the notions of theſe philoſophers concerning divine worſhip, but their notions concerning the firſt principle of all religion, the exiſtence of a Supreme Being, were much more conformable to right reaſon, than any of thoſe which prevailed at that time. There are many ſuch ſcattered about in the writings of PLATO, which the moſt orthodox theiſt might adopt. He acknowledged one Supreme Being, eternal, ineffable, incomprehenſible, all-perfect, the ſelf-exiſtent fountain of all exiſtence, divine and human, himſelf above all eſſence. God is truth, but above all truth; intelligent as well as intelligible, but above all intelligence; good, but above all goodneſs. He is none of theſe, but the principle of them all, as the ſun is the principle of light, and as he makes all things to be ſeen without being light or ſight himſelf. In a word, PLATO acknowledged the omniſcience, the omnipreſence, the infinite power and wiſdom of God. Theſe are very elevated ſentiments, which may be collected from his writings. They are ſtrained as high as the utmoſt pitch to which we can carry our ideas, and they point ſtill higher. So they ſhould; for after all the efforts that the mind

mind of man is capable of making, our conceptions will fall infinitely ſhort of their object, when this object is the majeſty of the all-perfect Being. Neither PLATO, nor they who received his philoſophy four or five hundred years after his time, and who were even more extravagant and leſs intelligible than he, could puſh their general and abſtract notions of this ſort too far. The intellectual proſpect is immenſe, and the intellectual ſight muſt be ſtrained, from objects clearly and diſtinctly perceived, to ſuch as are leſs ſo, and from theſe, ſtill farther; till it can be ſtrained no more, and the mind is loſt in the ſublimity of it's own conceptions.

IF theſe ſpeculations cannot diſcover, by infinite degrees, the whole truth, they cannot lead us into any error; and they ſerve to maintain in our minds that awful ſenſe, and that profound veneration of the Supreme Being, of the true God in the unity of his nature, which are due to him from every intelligent creature. Thus far, therefore, and in this manner, PLATO was an excellent maſter of natural theology. His errors, and thoſe of all other pretenders to metaphyſical theology, are owing to ſpeculations of another kind, relative indeed to theſe, but purſued in a different ſpirit, the ſpirit of vain curioſity; and are hypothetical from the firſt for want of real ideas whereon to ſet out. In a word, they are engraftments on the religion of nature and of reaſon, which neither nature nor reaſon

can

can admit. Our world ſeems to be, in many reſpects, the bedlam of every other ſyſtem of intelligent creatures; and with this unlucky circumſtance, that they who are moſt mad govern, in things of the greateſt importance, thoſe who are leaſt ſo: and CHARRON * might very well ſay, that minds thought capable of prophecy, illumination, revelation, and admiſſion into the ſecret councils of the gods, were ſuch as extaſy and enthuſiaſm tranſported, or ſleep ſet on dreaming. The obſervation may be carried down from antient to modern days, and may be verified by examples of chriſtian as well as heathen fanatics. There are, indeed, madmen little leſs ridiculous among thoſe who pretend to be metaphyſicians and theologians, great maſters of reaſon, lovers of wiſdom, inſtructors of mankind, and ſpiritual guides. It has been the pride and folly of theſe men in all ages to impoſe complete ſyſtems of knowledge on the world: whereas all human knowledge in it's utmoſt extent is deficient; and a ſyſtem of this kind, that affects to be, and that appears to be, complete, is therefore falſe. This folly prevailed moſt in the nonage of philoſophy; for as men have riſen in ſcience, they have ſeen their ignorance better. It continues however ſtill in ſome degree, and appears on ſome occaſions; but is ſo predominant on none, as on ſubjects that the firſt philoſophy furniſhes, on which every dabler in theology, nay every old woman, "quae-"dam anicula chriſtiana," to ſpeak like TER-

* L. i. c. 6.

TULLIAN,

TULLIAN, is ready to explain very particularly the divine nature and attributes, the conſtitution of the ſpiritual, and the creation and government of the corporeal, world; and, to ſpeak like another great doctor as well as heretic, the whole ſcheme, order, and ſtate of things *.

PLATO gave encouragement, and furniſhed matter, to this preſumption, by his engraftments on natural religion, by the extravagant notions which he propagated, and by his whole manner of philoſophiſing. His works have ſtood in the place of his imaginary ſyſtem of eternal ideas: and divines and metaphyſicians, who have thought, like MALBRANCHE, that they conſulted the Logos, and that they derived their knowledge from thoſe abſtract beings that reſide in the divine intelligence, have conſulted only PLATO, and have derived from his writings all the whimſies that compoſe their fantaſtical ſcience. They may have thought themſelves rapt into a third heaven, as St. PAUL ſays that he, or ſomebody that he knew, was; or that they roſe in extaſy, like PLOTINUS and PORPHYRY, up to a divine union: but we may aſſure ourſelves, that they never were rapt in any heaven but that of their own imagination, nor roſe to any divine union but that with the divine PLATO. To collect all the abſurdities, and manifeſt inconſiſtencies and contradictions, that are to be found in his works, would be to write

* CLARKE in his Evidences.

a treatiſe

a treatiſe bigger, and as ſtrong at leaſt to the purpoſe, as that of PLUTARCH on the repugnancies of the Stoics. To ſeparate, from what is reaſonable and true in this philoſophy, all the logical puerilities, all the falſe ſublime, all the tedious and flimſy argumentations that prove nothing; in a word, all that is unintelligible, or that informs us not when it is underſtood, would be a work ſomething like to that which our VERULAM * wiſhed to ſee performed in one view, and MONTAGNE † in another: and, if I miſtake not, the vogue of PLATO, the particular importance of ſome ſubjects, and the general hurt he has done to ſcience by laying falſe foundations of it, conſidered, this work would be more uſeful in a third view: it would ſhew us to what miſerable ſhifts the greateſt men are reduced, ſince PLATO is to be numbered among theſe, when they pretend to give complete ſyſtems of knowledge divine and human under the name of philoſophy ‖; when they aſſume unattainable knowledge to be attained, and that which is fantaſtical to be real. But this is a work we ſhall never ſee performed. Men, as dull or as mad as all the commentators and tranſlators of PLATO have been, are incapable of it; and men, who are neither, will find themſelves more agreeable employment.

THO this philoſopher was not a friend to the

* Advancement of learning, lib. iii. † Eſſays chap. xii.
‖ Philoſophia eſt divinarum et humanarum rerum ſcientia.

polytheiſm

polytheiſm and idolatry of the heathen world, he was not an enemy to ſuperſtition. Far from going about to deſtroy it, he refined, he ſpiritualiſed it, and intrenched it more in myſtery. He made it more plauſible, and more ſecure from the attacks to which it ſtood expoſed before: He made uſe indeed, on ſome occaſions, for ornament or illuſtration, of fables taken from the current mythology, like that of LOVE begot by PORUS on PENIA, when he was drunk in JUPITER's orchard, and the gods were met to celebrate the birth of VENUS: but the divine mythology he taught purpoſely was not ſo groſs. The gods of the heathen had been men. The ſepulchres of theſe immortals were ſhewn; and they retained in heaven the paſſions, the manners, and the habits of the earth. The celeſtial kingdom was peopled, like other countries, by colonies from abroad, by naturaliſations of foreigners, and by the generations of thoſe who had been there ſo long, that they ſeemed the aborigines of the country. The gods of PLATO were of another ſort. They were generated indeed, for he ſuppoſed too a production and propagation of divinities; but the image of this generation was changed, and gods were ſaid to be produced by emanation or proceſſion; emanations from the firſt divine eſſence, like beams from the ſun; proceſſions, or rather extenſions of the ſupreme and ſimple ſubſtance *; for thus

* Profuſio quaedam et extenſio ſummae et ſimplicis ſubſtantiae.

they have been explained by the platonics. In ſome ſuch incomprehenſible if not ineffable, manner (for what is ineffable to one of theſe philoſophers?) ſouls, angels, and demons were produced; by the ſuppoſed exiſtence of the two laſt of which, viſions and dreams, and every art of divination, and every ſuperſtition of magic, was upheld.

THIS little, that I have ſaid, may ſtand as a general ſpecimen of the platonic theology in this place; for in another, I ſhall give ſome that will be more particular. No man ever dreamed ſo wildly as this author writ—" velut aegri ſom-" nia, vanae finguntur ſpecies." But, as he had no divine miſſion nor authority to claim, all this reſted on his own authority: he was to prove it as he could, and every man was at liberty to receive or reject all or any of theſe doctrines as he found the proof. Thus they remained purely hypothetical; nor could be made dogmatical, till chriſtian divines made them ſo, by adopting them as parts of divine revelation. Then, indeed, they became dogmas to Chriſtians: and before that time, they were not ſuch to many of the heathens. They could not be ſuch to PLATO himſelf, whatever they were to ſome of his diſciples. He, who publiſhed them, knew that he invented them, or that he borrowed them from thoſe that did invent them, and that neither he nor they were led to them by any chain of knowledge. Neither he nor they could be the bubbles of theſe

doctrines; tho they, who received them for true theology, were ſo. It is not he who makes, but he who ſwallows the wine, that gets drunk. But as ſoon as Chriſtians found ſome, and thought they found others, of theſe doctrines in the goſpel, the difference I mentioned, between the authority of theſe divines, and that of the divines of paganiſm, was complete. The authority of revelation confirming that of PLATO, propoſitions, that were dubious to the one, became certain to the others, and philoſophical conjectures became articles of faith: juſt as it happened afterwards, when the authority of ARISTOTLE was added to both, and new doctrines were deviſed, by metaphyſical explanations and extenſions, under pretence of defending the former.

NOTHING leſs than this could have eſtabliſhed and continued the theology of PLATO. In his days, and long after them, philoſophy was for the moſt part very hypothetical. Phyſics were ſo. What wonder if metaphyſics were more, nay wholly, ſo? When PLATO had brought theſe, and ARISTOTLE logic, into repute, one of them made the material world metaphyſically, the other logically, and both very abſurdly. But when they ſet themſelves, and PLATO eſpecially, to raiſe an immaterial intellectual world, metaphyſical and logical architecture were moſt properly employed. They could employ no other: they knew little, imagined much, built beyond nature;

nature; and terms and phraſes, which ſupported their ſchemes, covered equally the deficiency and the futility of their matter: not unlike to thoſe columns and entablatures of painted paſtboard, that imitate the ſolidity of marble and deceive the eye. This was the leaſt laborious, the ſhorteſt and ſureſt way to fame: and whilſt men neglected the analyſe of ideas, and attended to the forms of argumentation, it was no hard matter to throw words into ſuch forms, as were ſufficient to keep up diſpute, in the defence of any doctrines. An hypotheſis, plauſible to the reaſon, or to the prejudices, or to the predominant affections and paſſions, of men, formed a ſect; and as ſoon as a ſect was formed, the hypotheſis became a demonſtrated ſyſtem, which the honor of the ſect was concerned to maintain. There were many ſuch among the Greeks: and they were all defended and attacked with equal obſtinacy, till time and conteſts wore them out. If platoniſm was not better founded in reaſon and knowledge than others, it was kept up long with greater art, and had greater good fortune afterwards. PLATO gave occaſion to both: to the firſt directly, and by choice; to the laſt indirectly, and by chance. His immediate ſucceſſors, SPEUSIPPUS, XENOCRATES, POLEMO, CRATES, CRANTOR, had acquired no great fame, nor had any great ſucceſs. The portic and the gardens of EPICURUS rivalled the academy, in oppoſing dogma to dogma. ARCESILAUS, therefore, and CAR-

NEADES changed the conduct of this philoſophical war. By affirming nothing, they left their adverſaries nothing to attack; and by aſſuming, in conſequence, the right of diſputing againſt every thing, they were at liberty to take their advantage wherever they found it. The example of their founder, and of his maſter, ſuggeſted this expedient to them, and countenanced them in the uſe of it. They became terrible to the Stoicians, and to the Epicureans, and to all the dogmatiſts.

As theſe men pretended to revive the firſt academy by reverting to ſcepticiſm, tho they were called authors of a ſecond and a third, and therefore academic philoſophers; ſo there were others, who, under pretence of adhering to the firſt academy, profeſſed themſelves dogmatiſts, and affected to be named Platonicians. Some of theſe men indeed became Peripatetics, or ſlided from platoniſm into ſtoiciſm, like the philoſopher ANTIOCHUS whom TULLY mentions *; whilſt the ſuſpenſion of aſſent was ſtill maintained, as the true principle of the academy old and new, by CLITOMACHUS, PHILO, and TULLY. VARRO ſays, in the Academics, there was no difference between the Peripatetics, certain dogmatiſts no doubt, and the old academy †.

* In Academ.

† Nihil enim inter peripateticos, et illam veterem academiam, differebat.

TULLY

TULLY ſays, that the academy they called the new, appeared to him to be the ſame as the old †. Thus the matter ſtood in Greece and at Rome. But the platoniſm that prevailed in Aſia and Egypt, and was taught in the famous ſchool of Alexandria, was unqueſtionably dogmatical in every point. If the philoſophers in thoſe countries did not find it, they made it, ſuch. It could not otherwiſe have ſuited the characters, nor have anſwered the purpoſes of Jews, of Chriſtians, and of thoſe who oppoſed chriſtianity: by all of whom it was, in ſome degree, and in a different manner, adopted, according to the method of the eclectic ſect that POTAMO of Alexandria founded. The object of this ſect was very ſpecious. Theſe philoſophers were to ſelect the beſt and trueſt placits from all others. But we may conclude that they ſelected, conformably to the human character, ſuch as agreed beſt with their own opinions; according to the account DIOGENES LAERTIUS ‖ gives of POTAMO, that he choſe thoſe things that pleaſed him moſt. Thus the Jews took ſome dogmas, the Chriſtians more, and the Pagans moſt of all, from PLATO's philoſophy; which became accidentally of greater extent, duration, and importance, than the author had any reaſon to expect.

† Hanc academiam novam appellabant, quae mihi vetus videtur.

‖ In praefat.

THERE are many things unintelligible in the antient philoſophers, many inconſiſtent and contradictory, even among thoſe who wrote with the greateſt clearneſs and preciſion; for I except neither CICERO nor SENECA. It would be time well ſaved to neglect the firſt: and nothing can be more ridiculous, than the pains that learned men take to diſguiſe or reconcile the others, inſtead of owning them to be, what after all their pains they are forced to leave them, inconſiſtencies and contradictions. But PLATO has this peculiar advantage over all the philoſophers of any name. He has puzzled mankind, not only by particular paſſages in his writings, but about his own general character as an author. The dogmatiſts, and the ſceptics, for ſuch in truth the academicians were, have claimed him: and it is at this hour a problematical point at leaſt, whether this great philoſopher and divine gave a full aſſent to the truth of his own doctrines. To all of them, to ſome of the principal, he could not. They were the fruits of his own and of other mens invention; and he muſt have been conſcious that they were ſo, as I obſerved above.

SECTION XIV.

IT is in itſelf of little moment in what ſpirit, and on what motive, PLATO writ, who, or what he was. The weight of reaſon, and not the authority of an author, ſhould decide our opinions:

opinions *: and this philoſopher himſelf ſpeaks very ſtrongly to this purpoſe, in many places, in the Gorgias particularly †. If a doctrine, which PLATO taught, be ſupported by reaſon or revelation, we ought to receive it with that aſſent which is due to truth; tho he were a ſceptic under the maſk of a dogmatiſt. If any of his doctrines are ſupported neither by reaſon nor revelation, we ought to reject them; tho he were a dogmatiſt under the maſk of a ſceptic. This is evident: and yet chriſtian divines have been in all ages as zealous to make him paſs for a dogmatiſt, as if nothing more was neceſſary to eſtabliſh the truth of a doctrine than to be aſſured that he thought it true, and taught it as ſuch. In the mean time, they did not enough conſider that they made a fool or a knave of their favorite philoſopher. Wrong methods of inquiring after truth and knowledge, and frequent contentions about them, ended in a diſpute at laſt, not whether there was any ſuch thing as truth, but whether there was any ſuch thing as knowledge. From hence aroſe dogmatiſts, acataleptics, and ſceptics ‖. If PLATO was one of the former,

* Non tam auctores—quam rationis momenta querenda ſunt. CIC. De nat. deor. l. i.

†—Alii alios ſe convincere arbitrantur, cum—multos et celebres teſtes produxerint—verum haec probationis ratio nullius eſt momenti ad veritatem, &c.

‖ Ex philoſophis alii ſe verum adinveniſſe jactant, et dogmatici appellantur. Alii pronunciant, verum nec inveniri

who boaſted that they had found the truth, and if there can be on every ſubject one opinion alone true, how came he to have different opinions on the ſame ſubject, not tranſiently nor inadvertently mentioned, but formally delivered and maintained? In the other two characters, if he believed all things to be abſolutely incomprehenſible, or if he reſtrained his aſſent becauſe, tho he did not deny that truth might be found, he did not determine neither that it had been found; in theſe two characters, I ſay, he might very fairly, tho not very uſefully, deliver contrary opinions, and defend or oppoſe any of them hypothetically. But neither the ſuppoſition of two doctrines, nor of two ſenſes, nor of two characters, in PLATO, that ſtale artifice by which critics make authors ſay or not ſay whatever they pleaſe, will excuſe him as a dogmatiſt, if he was one, and a dogmatiſt too who treated the moſt important points of knowledge, ſince the being of a God, the worſhip of him, the firſt principles of things, and the conduct of providence, were ſome of the objects of it.

MY way of thinking, which I have found no where the leaſt reaſon to alter, would hinder me from any farther conſideration of PLATO in this reſpect, if it was not worth our while to con-

veniri nec percipi poſſe, et cataleptici dicuntur.—Alii, aſſenſum ſuſtinentes, neque ſtatuunt verum inventum eſſe, neque inveniri poſſe negant, et dicuntur ſceptici, conſideratores, et ephectici, cohibitores aſſenſûs.

ſider

ſider how feebly the authorities we value the moſt are often founded. The fathers of the chriſtian church have maintained that PLATO was a dogmatiſt, and well they might; ſince NUMENIUS, a pythagorean philoſopher, aſſerted the ſame of PYRRHO, and ſince SEXTUS EMPIRICUS ſays * that ARCESILAUS was ſuſpected to be another. With the paradox concerning PYRRHO I have nothing to do; but ſurely it is as little poſſible to imagine what grounds SEXTUS, who lived four hundred years after ARCESILAUS, or St. AUSTIN, who lived above a century later, or indeed any man of his own age, country, or ſchool, could have to make a dogmatiſt of one, who diſclaimed all knowledge, like him, even that which SOCRATES excepted, the knowledge of his ignorance, as it is to imagine what NUMENIUS meant when he imputed dogmatiſm to PYRRHO. A man, who made it the buſineſs of his life, and the principle of his profeſſion, to diſpute againſt every propoſition that could be advanced, was not ſurely a ſceptic in appearance alone, "prima fronte," as SEXTUS ſays, but inwardly, and in very good earneſt. Notwithſtanding this, St. AUSTIN † took the fact for granted, and wrought up in his warm imagination a very ſubtile and pious ſcheme of policy, which is almoſt too fanciful for the ſaint, and which no man, leſs viſionary than he, can believe that the philoſo-

* Lib. i. cap. 31.

† Ep. ad Dioſc. ep. cxviii. ed. bened.

pher

pher ever entertained. Some ſuch there have been, however, and a reverend father ‡ of the oratory in France has treated this whimſy very ſeriouſly.

THE Stoicians then, according to St. AUSTIN, placing the chief happineſs of man in virtue, that is, in the mind; the Epicureans placing it in volupty, that is, in the body; and the Platoniſts placing it in the enjoyment of God, the latter judged very wiſely, that it was proper to prepare the way to truth by deſtroying, in the firſt place, the errors of thoſe ſects. They ſaw that their own ſublime doctrine would fall into contempt, if they publiſhed it among men immerſed in ſenſe, like the Epicureans; or even among the Stoicians, who gave the preference indeed to virtue, but who could not raiſe their conceptions up to ſomething divine and immaterial, to ſomething above mind as above body, to ſomething knowable by pure intellect, and yet far ſuperior to it, that is, up to God. They knew that they ſhould not be heard, if they went about to teach men, who believed atoms, or the four elements, to be the firſt principles of all things, that all things proceeded from an immaterial wiſdom ‖. They conſidered farther, that the Epicureans being perſuaded their ſenſes never deceived

‡ THOMASSIN De la maniere d'étudier la philoſ.

‖ N. B. This is ſaid purely to do honor to PLATO, for he was abſurd enough to make matter and ideas firſt principles jointly with God.

them;

them; and the Stoicians believing, like the Ariſtotelians, that altho their ſenſes might ſometimes deceive them, yet they could not acquire, without the aſſiſtance of their ſenſes, any knowledge of the truth of things, it would be to little purpoſe to tell either the one or the other that the only Being, which has a real exiſtence, cannot be repreſented to the mind by any of the images of ſenſe; and that this immutable Being is that alone which we conceive truly; becauſe pure intellect, which alone perceives the truth of things, alone perceives the exiſtence of this Being.

Now ſince ARCESILAUS could not flatter himſelf that theſe ſublime doctrines would be received, againſt the philoſophical prejudices that prevailed in his time, it behoved him to look forward, and to convey the pure ſtreams that flowed from the ſprings PLATO had opened, as St. AUSTIN * expreſſes himſelf in one of his letters, through a channel ſhaded and covered by brambles and thorns, leſt they ſhould be expoſed to beaſts that would render them foul and muddy. Nothing leſs than a ſubmiſſive faith, ſuch a faith as he mentions in his letter to CONSENTIUS †, a faith that muſt precede reaſon in order to purify the heart, and to prepare the mind to comprehend what it ought to admit implicitly at firſt, could impoſe ſuch doctrines; and nothing leſs than the authority of one, who was God and man, could

* To HERMOG. ep. i. ed. benedic. † Ep. cxx. ed. benedic.

impoſe ſuch a faith. Now the Platonicians could produce no authority of this kind, nor ſhew a God abaſed and humbled, before the coming of CHRIST. They were in the right, therefore, to conceal their doctrines, till this great event happened. But as ſoon as it happened, they opened the whole ſecret of their theology and metaphyſics. Some of them, indeed, were corrupted by the damnable curioſity of magic. But many of them acknowledged JESUS to be that God and man, in whom immutable wiſdom and truth were incarnated, and by whoſe mouth the eternal eſſence had ſpoken to mankind.

SUCH are the notions that St. AUSTIN endeavours to give in ſome of his epiſtles, and in his books againſt the academics, to eſtabliſh the opinion that PLATO was a dogmatiſt, and to account for the conduct of his ſceptical followers. But this ingenious ſcheme hangs ill together. What has been ſaid above, concerning the motives that ARCESILAUS had to make a public profeſſion of ſcepticiſm, ſeems much more probable than what our african biſhop advances. PLATO had rivals and enemies among the philoſophers, ARISTIPPUS and DIOGENES the cynic, for inſtance, who embarraſſed him more than once. But in his time, and for ſome time after him, no ſchool grew up that could vie with his. ARISTOTLE, who founded one that became famous, heard PLATO twenty years, that is, till PLATO died. EPICURUS did not come to

Athens till XENOCRATES was at the head of the academy, nor begin to teach ſo ſoon; and ZENO and ARCESILAUS were ſcholars of POLEMO at the ſame time. Thus far the courſe of the academy glided ſmoothly on. But here the conteſts began; and the ſubtilties of the portic were the more to be feared by ARCESILAUS, becauſe ZENO, who ſet up this rival ſchool, had been received in the academy, and had learned, like a ſpy, where and how it might be attacked with moſt advantage. Other dogmatic ſects grew up and ſtrengthened at the ſame time: and the ſureſt way to divert their attacks, was to attack them all on this one principle eſtabliſhed by SOCRATES, "Nihil ſciri, nihil percipi poſſe." If ARCESILAUS had gone about to defend his maſter's doctrines, which were not eaſy to be defended, ſurrounded as he was by enemies, he muſt have been beat on every ſide; whereas by renouncing all pretenſions to knowledge, he had nothing to defend, had no recrimination to fear, and might attack with his whole force. We may add, perhaps, a motive of pique to this of policy; for beſides that ARCESILAUS was piqued perſonally by ZENO, who employed the arms he had acquired in the academy againſt that ſchool, nothing could be more provoking than the arrogance wherewith the Stoics exacted the ſame aſſent to their moſt extravagant paradoxes, as the mind gives to truths that are objects even of intuitive knowledge. Thus we may eaſily conceive that it happened in philoſophy on this occaſion,

caſion, as it has happened in religion on many. Exceſs on one ſide produced exceſs on the other. So ſabellianiſm gave occaſion to arianiſm, and the foppery of Rome to the ruſticity of Geneva. So the dogmatical preſumption of ZENO, who affirmed the world to be a rational animal, as confidently as he affirmed it to be light at noon *, puſhed ARCESILAUS to deny every kind and degree of knowledge.

BUT it is not enough to have ſhewn that this account is probable, unleſs a ſhort and obvious reflection be added to ſhew that it is impoſſible the motives, St. AUSTIN aſſigns to the conduct of ARCESILAUS and the academics, ſhould be true. Now I aſk, whether theſe philoſophers could mean to conceal the doctrines of PLATO, which had been publicly taught by more of his ſucceſſors than St. AUSTIN mentions, and which were contained in his writings? They might abandon the defence of theſe doctrines, and ſhew little regard to them; but they could not mean to conceal them, and reſerve them for a more proper conjuncture, as St. AUSTIN aſſerts. They might do ſo the rather, and with a due regard to the honor of their founder, ſince by abandoning theſe they did not abandon him. He had jumbled two oppoſite characters moſt prepoſterouſly together. He was ſometimes apparently a dogmatiſt, and made even

*—Nec magis apparebit nunc lucere, quoniam ſtoicus, quam hunc mundum eſſe ſapientem. Acad.

SOCRATES

Socrates talk in that ſtyle. But ſtill the known ſceptical character of the maſter was the real character of the ſcholar. This character therefore Arcesilaus and Carneades aſſumed, as ſoon as it was for the honor and intereſt of their ſchool to abandon the other; and deemed themſelves, no doubt, more truly Platonicians, than any of thoſe who had been at the head of the academy before them. I confound Arcesilaus and Carneades together, as Tully does: for tho there might be ſome difference, which I will not have the trouble of conſidering, between the notions Carneades had, and thoſe of Arcesilaus, concerning the cauſes of incomprehenſibility; yet they both maintained, with equal zeal, and Carneades, it is ſaid, with greater force of argument, that we are unable to arrive at the truth of things by ſenſe or by reaſon.

If Socrates was not ſo great a genius, even with the help of his demon, as he has been repreſented, he was certainly ſomething better than a genius. He was a very good man: and I find in myſelf an unwillingneſs to believe him abſolutely a ſceptic, both on this account, and on account of that predilection, which you know that another good man, our friend the biſhop of Cloyne, has for him. That he might be ſuch, as to phyſics and all the ſciences which the Greeks called mathematics, or diſciplines *, I can

* Aul. Gellius.

eaſily

eaſily believe. XENOPHON gave the lie to PLATO, and all thoſe who pretended that he taught them; and SOCRATES himſelf complained bitterly, when he heard the Lyſis read †, of PLATO's miſrepreſentations. No philoſopher could be ſo eaſily, nor ſo ſafely, miſrepreſented. He preached, but he did not write: and we know nothing more of his philoſophy than the ſcraps his auditors retained, ſome of which XENOPHON has given us more truly, and PLATO more copiouſly. He picked up ſcholars occaſionally in the ſtreets and public places of Athens, and was a miſſionary of virtue to them all, from ALCIBIADES down to the meaneſt citizen. He rather refuted the ſophiſts, than labored to inſtruct directly: and this he did by a perpetual diſſimulation of his own opinions, and an ironical deference to theirs; which manner might give an air of ſcepticiſm to all he ſaid, even on moral ſubjects. In ſhort, if I cannot believe him a dogmatiſt, I will not believe him an abſolute ſceptic.

SOCRATES may be compared to the Cimmerians, who were deprived of the light of the ſun, but were not in utter darkneſs. He founded his ethics on probability, if you pleaſe; but it was on ſuch a probability, as TULLY explains in his reply to LUCULLUS; ſuch a probability, as a wiſe man muſt reſt upon, or all the rules of life will be ſubverted. If this was ſo, the difference between SOCRATES, and ARCESILAUS, and

† DIOG. LAERTIUS.

CAR-

CARNEADES was very great. They did not admit, at leaſt the former did not, the faint light of probability, and could be ſcarce diſtinguiſhed from thoſe who profeſſed pyrrhoniſm: tho St. AUSTIN thought fit to employ even the former, very piouſly, in preparing the way for the reception of the goſpel; for which he had no authority whatever, except that of his own wild imagination. For the dogmatiſm of SOCRATES and of PLATO, and for a diſtinction between the old and new academy, he had ſome indeed. CICERO introduces LUCULLUS, in the Academical queſtions, comparing ARCESILAUS to TIBERIUS GRACCHUS; and complaining, that as one of theſe diſturbed the peace of an excellent commonwealth, ſo the other overturned philoſophy, when it was brought to perfection. But TULLY decides the controverſy, without regard to probable arguments, by an appeal to fact. He had a bigot veneration for PLATO. He had ſtudied his works ſo long, and had familiariſed himſelf with them ſo much, that he ſeemed to have lived with this philoſopher, "ut pene cum his vixiſſe "videar;" as he ſays of himſelf. He knew PLATO better, than St. AUSTIN, and he aſſerted, that the new academy was the ſame as the old *, if PLATO, who founded it, was to be reckoned of the old, in whoſe works nothing was affirmed, who diſputed for and againſt many

* Academiam novam, quæ mihi vetus videtur.

things, inquired about all, and advanced none as certain †.

If Plato muſt be reckoned, notwithſtanding this, a dogmatiſt, it will be equally impoſſible to juſtify the regard that the chriſtian fathers, moſt of them at leaſt, paid to him themſelves, and that they encouraged others to pay; nor the uſe that they made of his writings. They, who called him the homerical philoſopher, thought more juſtly of him, than they who called him the attic Moses, or than they, who, ſtill more profanely, put him and Plotinus, and even Jesus Christ, in matters of doctrine, on a level ‖. By doing this they defiled chriſtianity with many ſuperſtitious notions, and mixed their theology up with much of that imaginary ſcience about divine, angelical, and human natures, which was derived from Egypt and the eaſt, through Pythagoras and Plato chiefly, to the Greeks and the Romans; and, from theſe two philoſophers, through the ſchool of Alexandria more than any other way (for dogmatical platoniſm, which included both, flouriſhed in that ſchool more than it had ever done in the academy) to the whole chriſtian world.

But farther, and to ſet this proceeding off in all the colors it deſerves, are we ſure that Pla-

† Nihil affirmatur—in utramque partem multa diſſeruntur, de omnibus quaeritur, nihil certi dicitur.

‖ Vid Ep. Nebridii ad Augus.

to, tho a dogmatiſt, was much in earneſt on every point of theology which the fathers of the church took from him, and incorporated into the chriſtian ſyſtem, as explanatory of it, or additional to it? He might not be ſo moſt certainly. DES CARTES was dogmatiſt enough in all conſcience; and yet, without derogating from this part of his character, we may believe that he was not very ſerious when he revived the whimſical notion of GOMEZ PEREYRA, that beaſts are automates, or pieces of clock-work; nor, perhaps, when he maintained the plenum. He had his particular reaſons, of prudence, to ſhelter himſelf from ſome attacks that he might apprehend; and of conſiſtency, to make the hypothetical parts of his philoſophy hang the better together, as well as of conformity to certain received opinions. PLATO might have reaſons of the ſame, or of other kinds. It would not be hard to point out ſome ſuch: and if he had no other, philoſophical oſtentation alone, and the deſire of acquiring fame by the publication of a new and more ſublime ſyſtem, for ſo all things that are unintelligible in metaphyſical theology are called, would have determined him to ranſack antient legends, as well as his own imagination, for every thing that might ſerve to this purpoſe. We may believe this the more eaſily, ſince there runs through all his works a tinſelled embroidery of this kind, on a ground of low conceits and tedious irony:

" Purpureus, late qui ſplendeat, unus, et alter
" Adſuitur pannus."

Now if PLATO may be juſtly ſuſpected of ſuch a proceeding, how ridiculous, as well as abſurd and profane, ought we to eſteem that of the fathers of the church? If the doctrines of PLATO are conformable to the goſpel, which I think they are not exactly in any one inſtance, except in ſome of the moral doctrines, it is abſurd; if they are different, or more extenſive in any reſpect, it is profane, to make them a ſupplemental code to the evangelical ſyſtem of faith. But if he publiſhed things that were neither dictated to him by his reaſon, nor even believed by him, whatever theſe things were, and how true ſoever they might appear on ſome other authority, it was ſovereignly ridiculous to accept them in any degree for ſuch on his. Of all this abſurdity, profaneneſs, and ridicule, they who built up chriſtian theology were guilty. Inſtead of commenting platoniſm by chriſtianity, they commented chriſtianity by platoniſm. Inſtead of applying revelation to explain, and the authority of the revealer to confirm, what they thought to be true in his writings, they applied platonic philoſophy to introduce and explain chriſtian, and the authority of PLATO to confirm what they received for true on the authority of CHRIST. They added the epiſtles to the goſpels, the doctrines of PAUL to thoſe of CHRIST; and to all theſe, the reveries of heathen philoſophy,

rabbinical extravagance, and chriſtian enthuſiaſm, till the Apocalypſe became a part of our holy ſcriptures, and the Athanaſian creed a ſummary of our faith.

SECTION XV.

I DO not expect, on this occaſion, from you the anſwer I ſhould be ſure to have from perſons more orthodox, than I know you to be, in the faith of the pretended catholic church. Such perſons would inſiſt on the authority of the church, by which all this heathen lore has been ſanctified; and ground this authority on paſſages of the ſcriptures, as they ground the authority of the ſcriptures on that of the church. This circular proof would deſerve no other anſwer, than that of ſilent contempt. CLEMENT of Alexandria opens another way to juſtify himſelf, and other fathers, for adopting ſo much heathen theology into chriſtianity. He ſuppoſes every ſyſtem of grecian and barbarian philoſophy to have been a branch of the eternal truth *; and all theſe branches to have been united in the chriſtian ſyſtem, like the trunk of the tree of all divine truth. Thus the doctrines of heathen theology, that were taught by PLATO and PYTHAGORAS, and derived from Egypt and the eaſt, are not ſanctified by a ſort of retro-active power, but are made divine by their original. If

*—Aeternae veritatis avulſam quandam particulam. Strom. lib. i.

now by theſe terms we do not underſtand that the human mind riſes up to the ſupreme mind, is united with it, and contemplates the ideas that are in it; if we do not underſtand, that the intellect of man is a part of the intellect of God, as the ſoul of man was thought to be a part of the deity, or of the ſoul of the univerſe; in ſhort, if we do not underſtand them according to any of thoſe myſtical, metaphyſical notions, that platoniſm propagated, and that CLEMENT was very likely to intend, they are capable of receiving a very true ſenſe. There are, no doubt, in theology ſome truths that human reaſon, the gift of God; and in this ſenſe alone divine, is ſufficient to demonſtrate, according to thoſe criterions of human knowledge, the things that are, and that we know to be, as the author of all nature ordained that they ſhould appear to creatures in our rank of being. Several ſuch truths the pagan philoſophers diſcovered. But then they blended them with monſtrous errors, derived from various extremes, by planning the divine order and economy on the human, or by neglecting the phaenomena of nature, or by making extravagant hypotheſes to account for them. They diſcovered the unity of the godhead, and they ſaw that worſhip is due from the creature to the creator. But then they ran into ditheiſm; and gave up the unity, that they might ſave the goodneſs, of the Supreme Being, which they imagined very falſely to be, as atheiſts objected that it was, inconſiſtent with the phaenomena.

nothena. They ran farther into polytheiſm, that they might provide a multitude of agents or miniſters to execute the will of God, and to govern under him, or to be mediators and interceſſors with him in behalf of mankind. As they took notions of mediation and interceſſion, ſo they took others of atonement and expiation, from the characters of men and of governments. Hence the offerings and ſacrifices, ſanguinary ſacrifices, human ſacrifices, ſuch as the Carthaginians, our Druids, the Mexicans, and other barbarous people, have inſtituted; from which examples of the utmoſt depravation of human reaſon, that ignorance, ſuperſtition, and habits of cruelty can beget, divines would ſometimes prove that ſuch ſacrifices, and the appeaſing of God by blood †, are agreeable to the natural reaſon of mankind.

It muſt be confeſſed, however, that, even in theſe days, men, whoſe natural reaſon was not thus

† Vid. Thomassin, Maniere d'étudier la philoſoph. &c. It may be worth while to obſerve here what is ſaid by a very great and worthy man, in a book writ on the principles of Hutchinson, to ſhew that chriſtianity is indeed very near as old as the creation. He admits that this belief is of all others the moſt unreaſonable, except as it is explained in the original. What now is the original, by the explanation of which this belief becomes reaſonable? It was the decree of God, that a Saviour ſhould die to atone by his blood for the ſins of men. It was therefore

thus depraved, ſaw by the light of reaſon alone how abominable ſuch rites as theſe were, and, little by little, as their reaſon improved, how abſurd all their other rites, and almoſt all their theological opinions, were. Polytheiſm was mitigated: idolatry was in good meaſure diſtinguiſhed away, among the philoſophers at leaſt: oracles and the arts of divination grew into contempt: and if heatheniſm was kept up by men above the vulgar, it ſeemed to be ſo only by the prieſts for lucre, and by others for fear of having no religion at all. Thus the way was prepared by reaſon for revelation, in the countries where chriſtianity firſt appeared, and which were enlightened by philoſophy. Philoſophy had begun to ſpiritualiſe religion, by exploding many of the groſs, the carnal conceptions of heathen theology;

fore his command, that, to keep this revelation in mind, the future ſacrifice of the Saviour ſhould be emblematically and prophetically repreſented by ſhedding the blood of beaſts in ſacrifices, accompanied with many typical and emblematical circumſtances. No other invention could be ſo likely to preſerve, and perpetuate, the knowledge and belief of a revelation ſo neceſſary to mankind. Strange abſurdities! the bloody ſacrifice to be made ſo many thouſand years afterwards was that of the Son of God, of the very God; and the emblematical inſtitution continued among men, who ſoon forgot that it was typical and emblematical only. Thus it ſerved to no other purpoſe, than to lead men into an opinion, that the deity was implacable, and ſins unforgiveable, unleſs he was appeaſed, and they were atoned for, by the ſhedding of blood.

and

and by ſubſtituting an inward devotion, purity of heart, and a pious diſpoſition of mind, to the outward pomp and ceremony of worſhip. That this repreſentation is true, the works of PLATO alone would be ſufficient to prove; altho EUSEBIUS * was deſirous to make it believed that no reformation had been made even in the opinions of philoſophers, before chriſtianity: but that, being then grown aſhamed of their polytheiſm and idolatry, they endeavoured to conceal them under the pretence and diſguiſe of allegory. In all caſes, when chriſtianity was once eſtabliſhed, the means of carrying this reformation of opinions to perfection were in the hands of chriſtian philoſophers and divines. It might have been expected too that revelation would unite, in one uniform ſyſtem of theology, all the converted pagans, whom reaſon had not been able to reconcile; ſince they had now, in the word of God, a ſure criterion, by which to try the truth of their opinions.

THE very contrary happened. They differed as much as ever, and with uncharitableneſs and hatred that had been unknown to them before their converſion. Whilſt they were pagans, they diſputed without quarrelling, and even embraced oppoſite ſects without becoming enemies. We ſee the Stoic, the Epicurean, and the Academic meeting amicably together in TULLY's works, which repreſent the manners of the age.

* Præp. evangel.

They

They endeavour to refute one another; but they live in the utmoſt intimacy of friendſhip: and if CARNEADES was exaſperated againſt the Stoics †, on account of their dogmatical, and, as we may venture to pronounce, their trifling but aſſuming, airs, neither TULLY nor even COTTA were ſo. Nay the former inclined, as much as an Academic could incline, to ſtoiciſm: and SENECA, who was profeſſedly of this ſect, and he, ſpeak often with the greateſt regard of EPICURUS, and with the greateſt tenderneſs of their epicurean friends.

How it came to paſs that men, who had embraced oppoſite opinions without acrimony, whilſt they were heathens, became inveterate enemies for this very reaſon, when they were Chriſtians; or how they came to be more divided than ever, even when they had one common rule of faith and doctrine which they all acknowledged alike, is not very hard to conceive. Whilſt they were merely philoſophers, they were attached to ſome ſect or other, not only by the illuſions of their own imaginations, by their affections and paſſions, by ambition and private intereſt, but by prejudices and habits contracted early, and ſometimes before they were able to judge for themſelves *.

To

†—Contra quorum diſciplinam ingenium ejus [CARNEADIS] exarſerat. Tuſc. diſp. lib. v.

*—Caeteri primum ante tenentur adſtricti, quam, quid eſſet optimum, judicare potuerunt.—infirmiſſimo tempore aetatis, aut obſecuti amico cuidam, aut una alicujus, quem primum

To this ſect, whichever it was, they adhered: and that which we may obſerve frequently in the political ſtruggles of our miſerable parties, happened, no doubt, in thoſe theological contentions. A falſe point of honor prevailed ſometimes over the love of truth; it determined the will even againſt the judgment; and men choſe rather to err with thoſe with whom they had long erred, than go right in new company, or alone. But ſtill, as they were mere philoſophers, and had nothing but reaſon, their own or that of their party, to oppoſe to reaſon in every inſtance in which they differed, and as the particular opinions of no one ſect intereſted the whole body of philoſophers, the ſtate, or the church, in any country; theſe men might differ, before their converſion to chriſtianity, without thoſe incentives to uncharitableneſs and hatred, which acted ſo powerfully on the malignity of their hearts afterwards. As ſoon as this malignity could exert itſelf, under the ſpecious pretence of zeal for the honor of God and for the purity of the faith, it broke out with violence. Every ſide aſſumed that the word of God ſpoke in favor of them; that the ſalvation of ſouls depended on believing as they believed; and that all thoſe who diſſented from them were guilty of hereſy: for this word grew ſoon into faſhion, and from having, as I believe,

primum audierunt, oratione capti, de rebus incognitis judicant, et ad quamcunque ſunt diſciplinam quaſi tempeſtate delati, ad eam tanquam ad ſaxum adhaereſcunt. Acad. quaeſt.

a very

a very innocent ſignification at firſt, it came, like the word tyrant, and ſome others, to convey a very odious idea at laſt. Heretics then were enemies to God, and rebels to his law. They were to be treated as ſuch by the orthodox: and hereſy and orthodoxy being determined by the ſtrength and weakneſs of parties, alternate, and therefore conſtant, perſecution was eſtabliſhed in the church of CHRIST.

The end of the Second volume.